

The
HAUNTED CIRCLE
AND OTHER OUTDOOR PLAYS

ADELAIDE NICHOLS

UNIVERSITY of
CONNECTICUT
LIBRARY



Charter Oak

* HAUNTED CIRCLE

1 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80

1 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80

PS/3503/A54117/A19/1924

hbl, stx

PS 3503.A54117A19 1924

Haunted circle, and other outdoor



3 9153 00755694 9

This book may be kept out

TWO WEEKS

only and is subject to a fine of TWO CENTS a day thereafter. It will be due on the day indicated below.

FEB 2 1927

OCT 3 1927

MAY 24 1928

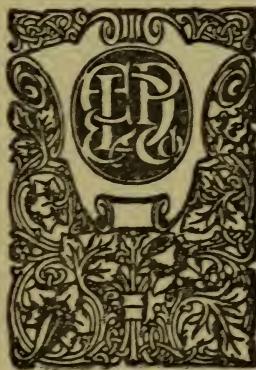
JULY 2 1931
JANE - 1931

APR 24 '47

The
HAUNTED CIRCLE
and Other Outdoor Plays

The
HAUNTED CIRCLE
and Other Outdoor Plays

BY
ADELAIDE NICHOLS *Baker*



NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE

Copyright, 1924,
By E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

All rights reserved

19718
875A
R52

Printed in the United States of America

TO
GRACE KNIGHT SCHENCK

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.....	ix
THE HAUNTED CIRCLE.....	I
THE GARDENER'S CAP.....	53
THE DEVIL'S FIELD.....	133
THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE.....	205

INTRODUCTION

Of late years the producing of plays by amateurs has been made the instrument for an increasing variety of purposes—education, Americanization, recreation, social service. I have heard of a school which makes its entire course throughout each year, including music, arithmetic, geography, history, literature and art—all focus on the giving of one play, within which lies, presumably, a whole year of education. The plays in the present collection will serve no such ambitious purpose, for in preparing them, I have thought less of improvement and education, than of the delight which comes to a group of people who enjoy dressing up and “making-believe.” In all communities there are men and women who have never outgrown this kind of pleasure and children develop the love of “make-believe” among their earliest resources for amusement. Here is a bond between people of different ages—and one of which too little has been made. The joy of working and playing with people older or younger than ourselves is too often shut away from us by our conventional forms of amusement. But to the group who knows it, belongs a very precious experience.

To all such groups I dedicate these plays—one for each of the four seasons. Though the plays are within the power of high school and college casts to produce, they are also adapted to a much wider range of ages. They are in a sense “miracle plays,”

INTRODUCTION

not because they follow the form of the old miracle plays, nor because any except *The Shepherd's Pipe* deal with religious miracles, but because they all deal with mortals who find themselves on the edge of a world beyond reality. In each play there is one character who stands as interpreter between the world of human beings and the world of imagination and romance. The actors of such plays must feel at home in both of these worlds and must be able to see that they are indeed very close to one another. They must make their audience equally at home in these two worlds. A cast of varying age can do this best of all. Older people, who actually know the emotions and experiences which the plays represent, are able to give greater subtlety and reality to the mortal characters. And the presence of children in the cast makes easy the way to romance and imagination.

In all of the plays, there are speaking parts for children and unlimited opportunity to use them in the dancing and the pantomime. Children rarely have a chance to act in plays with older people, and until I had produced plays in which the cast was composed of actors of different ages, I had not realized the possibilities for delight and effectiveness in such a cast. Children bring to acting a spirit of earnestness and enthusiasm which is an inspiration to older people working with them. And to the children, the fascination of taking part in a play is greatly increased if they are working side-by-side with grown-ups whose acting they admire. To the audience, such a combined cast brings all the fanciful charm which children give to acting, and the interest and emotion which only more experienced actors have to

INTRODUCTION

give. The combination of these two elements is essential to the most effective production of these "miracle plays."

The use of verse in the lines, and of music and dancing in the production, are other ways of bringing to the audience the illusion of a world of miracles.

MUSIC

In all of the plays, music is extremely important: in two it is the key-note of the miracle. It accompanies the appearance of the characters from magical worlds, the wood-spirits or moon-shadows of *The Devil's Field*, the nymphs and fauns of *The Gardener's Cap*, the ghosts of *The Haunted Circle* and the angels of the Christmas miracle play. So easily is the spell woven, that very simple music may give the effect, yet a place can be made for the finest ability that a community possesses.

A flute or a harp has a wonderfully magical effect, and a small orchestra of stringed instruments is a great help to all of the plays, yet a good pianist may make the music for *The Devil's Field* or *The Haunted Circle* very beautiful, and only a flute need be added for the magic pipes of *The Gardener's Cap* or *The Shepherd's Pipe*. In *The Shepherd's Pipe*, a small missionary organ will give the atmosphere of cathedral music, and four tubular chimes struck with a hammer can be used for the cathedral chimes. What instruments the producer of the plays uses must depend upon his resources and may be varied infinitely in various circumstances.

The music that was arranged for *The Devil's Field* was taken from MacDowell's *Woodland Sketches*

INTRODUCTION

and from Eastman's arrangements of Indian melodies. At the opening of the play, the Sachem entered during the openings bars of "From an Indian Lodge" by MacDowell. The wood-spirits stole in and danced to the melody which follows, and at the closing bars, the vision faded into the trees. Eastman's version of "An Indian Love Song" was used for the dance of the Moon Maiden, and the final dance of the spirits was accompanied by the playing of "In Autumn" by MacDowell.

DANCING

The dancing, like the music, may be as simple or as perfected as one pleases. The nymphs and spirits and ghosts may have had little training as dancers and yet learn for these productions steps and motions which are very lovely and picturesque. An actor who can interpret Constant or the Moon Maiden by sincere and graceful pantomime may create a spell as fine as that created by a highly-trained dancer. Yet there is opportunity in such parts for the display of the greatest skill.

In all these things, the music, the dancing, the acting, the requirement is not technical perfection, but imagination and sympathy and willingness to enter simply into a world of dreams. It is the task of the producer to make this atmosphere real to his cast and to bend their various talents to the expression of it.

COLLATERAL READING

For some of the plays, the reading of certain books may prepare the actors for the spirit in which they are to play their parts. For instance, the cast of

INTRODUCTION

The Shepherd's Pipe should come to it full of the spirit of mediæval mysticism which breathes in old French Christmas carols and the legends which have been preserved or adapted or imitated from the old tales of miracles.

<i>Le Jongleur de Notre Dame</i>	Anatole France.
<i>Little Wolf's Wonder Shoes</i>	Frances de Copee.
<i>A Story of the Christ Child</i>	Elizabeth Harrison.
<i>The Tale of the Other Wise Man</i>	Henry Van Dyke
<i>How the Chimes Rang</i>	Raymond MacDonald Alden.

If the actors know the history and spirit of the Crusades from such books as *The Crusades* by Archer and Kingsford, Scott's *Talisman*, Well's *Outline of History* (the chapter on "Christendom and the Crusades") they may more easily interpret the feeling of those who sought to serve God in a way that seems fantastic and strange to us today.

The Devil's Field also requires an understanding of a strange religious manifestation. The attitude of the Puritans toward the Indians whom they discovered in the wilderness is found in several parts of Bradford's History.

Samuel Sewall's diary has some instances of the effect of Puritan doctrine on the minds of children. The attitude of a Puritan minister toward witchcraft is expressed by Cotton Mather in his *Wonders of the Invisible World*.¹ From all these books the producer and the older members of the cast can feel the curiously vivid imagination of that group of

¹ Printed in Drake's *Witchcraft in New England* and in *Salem Witchcraft*.

INTRODUCTION

people who are thought of as repressing imaginative expression. Young people will find Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* full of the atmosphere which that time left as a heritage to its descendants.

For *The Gardner's Cap*, Mallory's *Morte D'Arthur* and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* may show the actors the special source and color of Prudence's dream of romance. The *Age of Fable* or Gayley's *Classic Myths* will introduce them to the race of Pan and to the many poems which have celebrated him and his followers. Shelley's *Hymn of Pan* is especially full of the magic of the pipe, and Stedman's *Pan in Wall Street* has a whimsical suggestion of the return of Pan to the modern world, which is in the mood of *The Gardener's Cap*. The chapter on "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn" in Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows*, shows how Pan may inspire his worshippers. In *The Crock of Gold*, James Stephens has mingled two alien mythologies and set Pan adrift in a world that does not know his name. The atmosphere of many parts of that book would add to the acting of *The Gardener's Cap* infinite charm. Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Algernon Blackwood's *Garden of Pan*, and many others bring human beings to the verge of a mystical world in which beings akin to Pan live and frolic.

SETTING

The Out-of-Door Plays

Each play is designed to be given at a certain season. The Spring and Summer and Autumn ones should be given, if possible, out-of-doors. *The Devil's Field*, which is somewhat akin to the spirit

INTRODUCTION

of Hallowe'en, might be given as late as October with simple scenery on an indoor stage. But the lines really call for an out-of-door setting in early September when the maples have just begun to turn.

Such delightful settings may be discovered in lawns and woods and gardens, that the task for the producer of the out-door plays is very simple. A wide grassy space on a lawn or village green, framed with enough trees and hedges to make wings, is a splendid place for *The Haunted Circle*. *The Gardener's Cap* needs a formal garden. The lawn before an old-English, half-timber house makes a good setting for it, and the effect of a garden can be achieved merely by adding prim rows of flowers and the stone garden seats with their screens of green behind them. *The Devil's Field* may be given in a real clearing in some maple woods, or in a grassy space set with young maples and cedars for the occasion. Stacks of corn and the fallen log which is used as a seat by the actors, complete the illusion of David's hill-top field.

This play should, of course, be given at night with lighting arranged to show the characters clearly and yet to give an effect of a wood-rimmed space full of mystery and shadows. A strong electric light in a reflector, hidden at either side of the stage and a few foot-lights near the center to counteract the central shadow left by the side-lights, will be quite enough. At the beginning of the play, there is twilight, and the lights should be shaded with screens of blue silk or gelatin so that the light is mysterious and dim. When the Moon Maiden enters, screens of orange change the light to a soft gold radiance that will help to separate the dream from the rest of the play.

INTRODUCTION

The Christmas Play

The Shepherd's Pipe, of course, must be given indoors and seems perhaps the most difficult to set. Yet even on a small stage, the square before the cathedral may be suggested by a series of Gothic arches at the back of the stage. On the left, the doorstep and doorway, framed by a few cedars, indicate the cottage, and on the right, the shrine, a pent-roofed shelter for an image of the Christ Child in a manger, will suggest the unseen cathedral. A lantern hung over the door of the cottage or a lighted window showing through the trees, brings the light to the front of the stage on one side, and the candle burning before the crêche makes a spot of light on the other side and gives the excuse for keeping the light on the foreground. This leaves the arches at the rear in shadow, giving a greater effect of space to the square. The distance behind the arches can be suggested by a plain blue back-drop.

When the cathedral scene is to begin, the stage is darkened and the back-drop is raised. The light is then thrown full on the space behind the arches which stand sharply silhouetted against the bright chancel of the cathedral. The chancel may be deep and mysterious or there may be room only for the altar on which the crêche is laid and for the priest and the gift-givers to stand before it. The rest of the worshippers kneel in the dimly lighted foreground. Behind the altar, a deep red curtain or an altar-piece or a stained-glass window will give the illusion of a cathedral apse. The stained-glass window may be made of transparent paper and has great possibilities for beauty of color and light. The angels

appear massed behind the altar, at the drawing of the curtains, the parting of the altar-screen, or the sliding away of the window to leave a frame for the vision. Both the transition to the cathedral scene and the appearance of the vision are miracles very simply achieved by lighting which suppresses some details and discloses others.

The play might be very beautifully given in the chancel of a church, by screening the altar with greens or curtains and using the foreground as the cathedral square, until at the opening of the miracle scene, the altar is disclosed.

COSTUMES

The costuming of all the plays is such as can be satisfactorily accomplished in communities where professional costumers are unknown. Indeed the atmosphere of the plays is better served when the costuming represents the same individuality and imagination which is needed to make the acting effective.

The mediæval costumes of *The Shepherd's Pipe* can be made from inexpensive materials or adapted from material on hand with books like Racinet's *Costumes Historique*, *English Costume*, Volume II, by Calthrop, *Dresses and Decorations of the Middle Ages*, Shaw, to suggest the innumerable quaint and unexpected touches which make such costumes interesting. Even the armor of the crusaders may be "home-made." The effect of chain-mail can be achieved by knitting doublets with heavy gray or silver twine. Shining plate armor is made by sewing the tin disks commonly used to fasten roofing paper, to gray cambric doublets and helmets. The helmets of the crusaders were often like close-fitting hoods

INTRODUCTION

which came down over the neck and shoulders and left the face exposed. These are far easier to make and much more comfortable to wear than heavy pot-helmets with awkward visors.

If the angels are white-robed, with wings springing from their shoulders and reaching high over their heads, the effect of miraculous brightness and of superhuman size is heightened. The wings may be made of white cambric stretched over wire frames and covered with feathers cut from white crêpe-paper. If the circumstances make color rather than brightness of light the greatest need in the cathedral scene, the angels' costumes may be of the various colors shown in Italian pictures such as Fra Angelico's, and their wings may be gold or crimson.

The Haunted Circle and *The Gardener's Cap* are of more indefinite period. I suggest 18th or 19th century costumes for the human characters. Late 18th century costumes like those sketched by Hugh Thomson in his charming illustrations for Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* or Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, would fit *The Haunted Circle* admirably. In *The Gardener's Cap*,² Madam Hearthworthy might wear Victorian flounces of glistening black and a high comb to give her greater dignity. The full ruffled skirts and trim waist of an 1860 dress would make Prudence's second costume an excellent contrast to her mediæval gown. The mediæval gown should be of some rich material, beautiful in color but very simply made as though Prudence herself had concocted it for her play-acting. Constant's costume should suggest his faun-like character by its

² *Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century*, Fischel and Boehn have designs.

INTRODUCTION

ragged greens and browns, yet should have a remote connection with mortal clothing so that his identity may be veiled at first. It needs only the addition of the smock to make him appear to be a gardener or the addition of garlands and the disclosure of his horns to make him entirely a faun—in appearance much like the other fauns who come dancing out at the end of the play. They may be clad in close-fitting costumes—with trousers suggesting the furry shanks of fauns and may wear garlands of green or leopard skins. The nymphs and the Ghosts of Spring in *The Haunted Circle* may have costumes of cheese-cloth dyed in a variety of lovely and unusual shades by mixing and blending the dyes.

The costumes worn by the Moon Shadows in *The Devil's Field* should be fantastic, yet should suggest Indian mythology by their severe lines and fringed edges. Soft browns and gold and orange blended give the feeling of the autumn woods and indicate the kinship to the Moon Maiden. Her costume is much like those of the Moon Shadows, only more luminous and golden. A crescent banded to the back of her head in the manner of an Indian feather, will make her seem an Indian goddess, instead of suggesting Diana as does the conventional crescent on the forehead. The bats are little children dressed in close black garments with wide wings fastened to their shoulders and wrists.

The Puritan costumes of the mortal characters are easy to suggest by adding caps and kerchiefs to any very simple dresses for the women and by giving steeple hats, wide collars, broad belts and shoe-buckles to the men, when complete Puritan costumes are not available.

INTRODUCTION

In costuming, as in every detail of the production, the lighting, the properties, the number in the cast, the music, the dancing, the effect may be varied to fit the resources of each group who may be producing one of the plays. The real source of perfection is, of course, imaginative ingenuity and a love of working on the production until it reaches a high standard of completeness and beauty.

Such a spirit has already made the giving of some of these plays a happy experience in one community. To other groups who may undertake them, I can only wish equal happiness and even greater success.

ADELAIDE NICHOLS.

Wilton, Connecticut

November, 1923

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

A Spring Enchantment

CHARACTERS

SPRING

THE GHOSTS OF SPRING RAINS

Youth, Warmth-about-the-Heart, Pranks, Love.

A ROBIN }
A CROCUS } Spring Poets

THE GHOST of the Hawthorne Spray

SQUIRE SCUTCHEON

DAME RACKAM

DICK

MISTRESS ANNE HAWTHORNE

GEOFFREY SCUTCHEON (the Squire's Son)

THE PEOPLE OF SCUTCHEON

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

SCENE: *The village green in the town of Scutcheon, England. In the center stands the May-pole, which for the purposes of this play must have the streamers ready for the May-pole Dance. But they are to be inconspicuously tied, and the pole is not yet garlanded for the May festival. It is still early Spring, —so early that unobservant mortals can hardly be aware of it yet. Poets, no doubt, have been humming over the old Spring rhymes for several weeks. But they are the first to feel Spring when the grass is still only faintly green and days of mist and rain keep the unpoetical indoors.*

Two early Spring poets are the first to appear. They are the Robin and the Crocus. The Crocus bobs up first from a tuft of green at the right of the stage. She fluffs her golden petals consciously about her eager, fairy face and disposes herself for the greatest possible show. Then she begins her Spring poetry:

CROCUS.

La! What a satisfaction
To get a breath of air!
Below they're in distraction
With bustle to prepare
It's quite confusing there.

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

So I slipped out betimely
And came adventuring
And here I am sublimely
Ahead of everything
To wake the world to Spring!

(But another Spring poet comes to contest this honor with the Crocus. It is the Robin, running with his famous jerky gait and speaking poetry as he runs. His words are drolly suited to his motion. He does not see the Crocus at first, so he takes the center of the stage and unabashed voices the glorious claims of a discoverer.)

ROBIN.

I am the first: I am the first!
And so my pride is pardonable.
Ready to burst, ready to burst
With all the world my breakfast table.

(The Crocus laughs, of course, and interrupts his rhapsody with more of her own inimitable verse.)

CROCUS.

Ah, there you are, you greedy!
But I am out of bed,
A little bit more speedy
As well as better bred
I came here just ahead.

(The Robin turns to her, unpleasantly surprised to find that another poet is ahead of him. But he retaliates only with mild sarcasm.)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

ROBIN.

Why, bless my eyes! Why, bless my eyes!
Who is the lady that bespoke us?
What a surprise! What a surprise!
It is—it surely is a Crocus!

(*The Crocus arises to sweep him a mocking curtsey.*)

CROCUS.

And so you know that Spring is ready!

(*The Robin is moved to still deeper irony by her impudence.*)

ROBIN.

I had not guessed before, my lady!

CROCUS.

Surely you found the worms prophetic!

(*The Robin would naturally be shocked by such a reference to food.*)

ROBIN.

How can you be so unpoetic
As to allude to such a thing
Amid the poetry of Spring?

(*The Crocus sweeps another curtsey, which is a climax to the ironical tilt between the rival poets.*)

CROCUS.

I humbly beg your pardon, king!

(*From the far edge of the green, Spring enters with the Ghost of Spring Rains trooping after her. There are a host of them, all in*

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

misty gray cloaks and hoods, and as they whirl across the green, Crocus lifts her face thirstily. The Ghosts swirl round them to a sound of elfin music. Spring stands in the center near the May-pole. She is gray-hooded like her ghosts, but wisps of bloom, twisted in her hair, peep out from her hood and a frothy pink escapes the edges of her long cloak. She spies the Crocus and the Robin just as they step forward with mouths opened to greet her. They are about to burst forth "Oh, Spring!" or "Oh, lovely Spring!" but she waves them off desperately and then covers her ears with her hands.)

SPRING. Not a word! I know what you will say! You poets! One always knows what the Spring poets will say before they open their mouths! And how they follow me with their "Oh, Spring's" and "Ah, Spring's" and "doves" and "loves" and "rills" and "trills" and "thrills"! A chime of poor rhyming rings round me wherever I move and I must dance to a bewilderment of impossible rhythms! No, I never can escape the poets! This time I thought I had stolen in so softly that they would not hear. I came in disguise so that I might not be recognized by the "bowers" and "flowers." Yet behold! two Spring poets already here before me! It can only mean that you have found me out!

BOTH. Of course! You are Spring!

SPRING. But how—without the flowers and the bowers?

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

BOTH. Why of course, by the showers! (*They expand with triumph and delight. Spring makes a gesture of despair.*)

SPRING. Oh, you incorrigible poets! And I have been wearing this hideous cloak for a week to deceive you!

(*The Robin is running about in his glee and chanting with characteristic rhythmic accompaniment.*)

ROBIN.

It is no use when poets are loose!
It is no use when poets are loose!

SPRING. Loose and use! Were there ever such poets as my Spring poets? And here they sit singing right in the center of my Haunted Circle.

(*The Crocus and the Robin are politely interested.*)

CROCUS. Is this your haunted circle?

SPRING. It shall be. I have come to lay my spell upon it—a spell too mystical for rhyming and deeper than the wells of Parnassus. Put your finger on your lips while I weave it, and you shall see a miracle to bewitch all England.

(*The Robin and the Crocus follow her commands and withdraw to the edge of the green in respectful anticipation of a miracle. Spring throws out her arms to the Ghosts who are hemming the green with a misty throng.*)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

Come, Ghosts of Spring! Come, memories of past Springs, and dreams of future Springs and whims of every Spring since the world began, and weave the circle which shall trip the hearts of all mortals who enter here. None shall escape without a ghost of Spring to tease him into adventure and merriment and madness. Come, ghosts with your garments of rain and your hearts of witches, for I am Spring and I have come to enchant the world!

(The gray ghosts come forward and weave a magic dance, scattering flowers in a ring. Then one by one they slip away to the back of the green and stand swaying mystically. The haunted circle is left traced on the grass, making a wide circle of flowers around the May-pole. In the center stands Spring, her cloak flung back so that her dress of soft lavenders and pinks is disclosed. The hood has slipped from her flower-crowned head. Amid the flowers in the ring, kneel four little ghosts, one at the North, one at the South, one at the East and one at the West.)

So it is complete, my garland of Spring witchery—my haunted circle with a ghost at North and South and East and West! And who are you, little ghosts who haunt it? *(Spring goes to one of the ghosts and bends over her.)* Lift up your hood of rain and let me see.

(The ghost throws back her hood with an exuberant gesture and lifts to Spring a rosy face.)

YOUTH. I am Youth!

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

SPRING. Ah, Youth, you will know whom to haunt today. You will know her by slow feet and groping hands. Fill her with the memories and the magic of past Springs! (*Spring pulls Youth's hood over the rosy face once more and turns to another ghost.*) And you?

(*The next little ghost widens his cap grotesquely to show his elfin mischievous face.*)

PRANKS. I am Pranks.

SPRING. Wait for Dick, the young son of a godly sexton. For all his father's pious trade, he will be easy prey for you, oh Pranks! He hardly needs your prompting to turn him into the devil of the village. Keep your hood drawn, impudent one, for you are the luckiest when you are just out of sight. (*She goes to the next, whose gray cloak cannot hide a rosy robe beneath it.*) And you, glowing like a coal under your mist of rain—

WARMTH. I am Warmth-about-the-Heart!

SPRING. One will come by who has need of you. His heart has long been chilled with loneliness and too much wealth and pride. Though he thinks that he is happy, the wintry years have been binding him with their chains of ice. Haunt him till the chains that bind his heart break and fall apart with a ringing of laughter.

WARMTH. I shall watch for him.

(*Spring goes to the fourth ghost who is kneeling at the right in an attitude of adoration. He seems worshipping some unseen divinity.*)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

SPRING. My most haunting spirit, you are already rehearsing old and beautiful phrases. Yes, I hear, and I feel even my cheeks growing crimson though I have known you, Love, so long. For whom are you waiting today?

LOVE. For one who is even now coming to meet me, though she does not know why she comes.

SPRING. Is she young and fair?

LOVE. Ah, yes! It is for such I wait most eagerly.

SPRING. Young and fair! Can there be such a one who does not know that she is seeking Love?

LOVE. She has told herself that it is not maidenly to seek me and she thinks that such doctrines have persuaded her heart. But it is Spring, and my magic will be too strong even for her.

SPRING. Ah, that is well. None of them shall escape a touch of enchantment today. They shall all step within my haunted circle and what they have lost of the magic of past Springs shall possess them once more. And for some there will be new magic of which they have only dreamed. For listen! Coming even now over the road between here and Oxford there is a victim of mine. He is very young and such are easy prey for my wiles. So I laid a trap for him last night in a blossoming hawthorne spray. He picked a hawthorne bud and was bewitched so that he forgot his studies at Oxford and thought only of home and a maid he had seen once in this

village. Now he is journeying hot-foot over the homeward road. And little does he guess that one of my little ghosts, the ghost of the hawthorne spray, has him fast by the hand, leading him—leading him straight to his heart's desire!

LOVE. Ah, it is the form of that youth I shall take today when I lay my snare for that maiden's heart!

SPRING. Ah, Love, you are ever a dissembler!

LOVE. Does not Love come to each maid in the form of the beloved? To this maid I shall appear as a young student from Oxford! She has seen him only once, but he is even now journeying toward Scutcheon, haunted by a ghost of Spring! Ah, she shall remember him when she sees this disguise of mine! Behold! (*Love rises and flings back his cloak and shows that he wears the doublet and breeches of a youth. Spring claps her hands.*)

SPRING. A rare counterfeit of a goodly youth. This will be the merriest jest of all! Oh, I am eager to see it complete. But I must not tarry now for there is much to do. Come, Ghosts of Spring rains, for we must sweep on through the boughs of apple trees to bewitch the world ere it guess that we are astir. (*Spring dances once round the circle and the ghosts follow her. She touches each of the four kneeling ghosts as she passes and then dances away with her misty crew behind her. The four ghosts are left among the flowers. The Robin stands alert, deciding whether he shall follow Spring or remain near the Haunted Circle.*)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

ROBIN.

I shall go too! I shall go too!

For where spring treads, the worms are plenty!

(*But he cannot leave without a touch of Spring romance. He runs to the Crocus gallantly.*)

But I love you! But I love you!

"So come kiss me, sweet and twenty!"

(*The Crocus pouts scornfully and flounces her petals.*)

CROCUS.

Goodbye, you greedy poet,
That borrowed song you sing,
Don't think I do not know it,
Goodbye, conceited thing!
I'll tarry near the ring
To see the ghosts of Spring.

(*The Robin, with a nonchalant flirt of his tail, turns and hops out after Spring and the ghosts. The Crocus looks after him and seems to spy someone approaching. She is immediately in a flutter of delight and excitement.*)

But here come two. I know them,
Unwarned that Spring is here.
I shall not speak to show them
The magic circle near,
But wait—and watch—and hear!

(*She nestles back into her clump of green and pulls her petals about her face. She is barely hidden before the first two mortals*

'destined to be victims of the Haunted Circle have entered. The Squire stalks a little ahead, towing by the ear Dick, an impish boy of fourteen. The Squire is a dignified, hard-jawed man, dressed with all the pomp of the Lord of Scutcheon. His splendid calm is unruffled by the antics of Dick who is struggling wildly to escape the iron grasp of his captor. At the same time Dick is clinging to his fishing rod. His long woolen muffler streams out behind him, giving still more an air of desperate haste to his progress. The Squire, in spite of Dick's contortions, manages to hold aloft a large green umbrella, which he has no doubt put up against the Ghosts of the Spring Rains. As he enters, he lectures Dick pompously.)

SQUIRE. You, the son of a sexton! You, brought up at the very church door! You will run away from school, will you? Neglect all opportunities for education—sit like a ninny when you are asked a simple question—go off to sleep when your teacher, Mistress Hawthorne, is reading you improving books—yawn in her face when she reproves you—this is the report of you I have had before now, sir! And to cap it all, I find you with a fishing rod on a school morning. What excuses can you offer? (He halts in front of the Haunted Circle and jerks Dick up in front of him to emphasize this fearful question. Dick is a little abashed to be brought suddenly before the face of the Squire in so terrifying a manner.)

DICK. Well, Squire Scutcheon, sir, I—Nobody

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

can't help falling asleep when Mistress Hawthorne reads. She almost falls asleep herself sometimes.

SQUIRE. She is doubtless wearied trying to put learning into the block heads of ungrateful lads. What cause have you to fall asleep? You're wide awake enough today, I observe, playing truant to go fishing.

DICK. Anyone could keep awake fishing: no one can keep awake hearing reading. Why, you fall asleep yourself in parson's sermon—

(The Squire reddens with surprise and anger both at Dick's information and at the temerity of his volunteering such a suggestion. He shifts his grasp suddenly to Dick's collar and begins shaking him savagely while he splutters with rage.)

SQUIRE. What, you young—! How dare you speak impudently and falsely of your Squire—the father of your village—without whose patronage—

(Dick tries unsuccessfully to change the subject. He is slightly inarticulate from the force of the Squire's shaking.)

DICK. A-ow! Your 'brolly's dripping water down my neck.

(The Squire splutters on till he has raised himself to a passion that is almost lyrical.)

SQUIRE. Your father shall hear that you are both truant and ignorant, lazy and indolent, stupid and ignorant, wicked, impenitent—*(He pauses only because his vocabulary is exhausted.)*

DICK. That sounds like poetry, and poetry is what puts me to sleep. Oh, how wet I am with the drippings of that 'brolly!

SQUIRE. If you had desired to be dry, you might have stayed at school. As you chose the way of the wicked, you must expect his reward. Come, I can't waste words with you here in the shower. Come along—

(With a sudden twist of his body, Dick at last frees himself from the Squire's grasp, and runs laughing into the circle. As soon as he steps across the boundary of flowers, elfin music sounds, and Pranks skips up and catches the end of Dick's woolen muffler. Dick skips three times round the circle like a young faun, Pranks following unseen behind. The Squire turns ridiculously round and round to see what has become of his captive. At sight of Dick's triumphant capers, he goes off again into a splutter of rage.)

How dare you? Come back! Here, you young scapegrace! *(He knows better than to attempt pursuit of one with Dick's natural advantages, so he takes refuge in his dignity and the power of his position.)* It is beneath my dignity to coerce you. But if you do not follow me at once, I will send the constable to fetch you. So you had best follow. *(The Squire turns to make a pompous departure. Pranks whispers in the boy's ear and Dick, nodding and chuckling, swings out his fishing rod as the Squire turns to go and catches the green umbrella. It spins into the circle and Dick seizes it. The Squire yells*

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

with startled rage, and forgetting all dignity, dashes into the circle after Dick and the umbrella. As soon as the Squire enters the circle, elfin music sounds and Dick runs round the circle with the Squire in mad pursuit. Pranks is running ahead of Dick, towing him by the woolen scarf. Then Warmth-about-the-Heart, springing up, catches the Squire's flying coat-tails and haunts him. The wild parade of ghosts and mortals rush three times round the Haunted Circle. The Squire splutters more and more feebly as he runs.) How—How—How—What did you do that for?

(Dick pauses at a safe distance and the race ceases. The Squire is quite too exhausted to move a step toward him now.)

DICK. You didn't have need of it, sir. The shower is gone.

(The Squire notices with surprise that this is true.)

SQUIRE. Why, bless my soul! You're right! Now that's extraordinary, most extraordinary to say the least! How do you account for it?

DICK. I only noticed it suddenly, sir, when I got out from under your 'brolly. I guess it was sunning all the time. Looks like Spring showers were beginning. They always come and go like that. I just thought I'd tip the news to you.

(The Squire laughs for no very apparent reason except perhaps that Warmth-about-the-Heart has been slyly nudging him.)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

SQUIRE. An odd way of informing me that Spring has come! Catching my umbrella from over my head! A very odd way indeed!

(*Dick takes courage from the laugh.*)

DICK. But it was a fair catch, wasn't it, sir!

SQUIRE. A very fair catch! Quite a remarkable catch!

(*Warmth-about-the-Heart is seen guiding his hand gently toward his pocket.*)

That trick is—almost—worth—a sixpence. (*The hesitation is due only to his search for the sixpence. Dick upon receiving it is almost overcome with amazement.*)

DICK. Oh, thankee, sir! Do you think I should?

(*The squire wakes suddenly to the shocking nature of this highly unprecedented treatment of a criminal.*)

SQUIRE. Why, no! Bless my soul! Of course you shouldn't! If I encourage you in this fashion, you'll play truant every day. What put such an idea into my head, now? Most unusual! (*He is so puzzled that he actually appeals to Dick. Pranks and Warmth-about-the-Heart, who could explain everything, are quite invisible to him, of course. They exchange glances of triumph behind the backs of their victims. Dick is quite unable to explain the mystery and replies with unaffected innocence.*)

DICK. I don't know, I'm sure, sir. I wasn't looking for a sixpence.

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

SQUIRE. Perhaps I was a little hasty—

(Warmth-about-the-Heart steps up quickly to prevent a relapse, and at her touch the Squire softens again.)

But that was a fair catch if there ever was one and—

(Dick hastens to divert the Squire lest his hesitation may lead to the loss of the six-pence. Luckily Dame Rackam is approaching.)

DICK. Look, sir, at old Goody Rackam coming! She's muttering to herself again. These days she's glum as anything since she's heard she's to leave the cottage at the manor and go to the poor farm.

(The Squire's reply might almost be considered apologetic except that the Squire has not been known for years to apologize.)

SQUIRE. Yes, to be sure, but she had to come to it some day. Old age will take us all. Though I regret her sad case extremely, I couldn't let her stay on at the cottage. She let things grow slack.

DICK. She's a sour old one, too. Look at her now! She thinks it's raining, I'll be bound. Look at her basket tipped over her head to keep off the rain. Shall I take that off now just to show her it's pleasant weather?

(Dame Rackam has come in moaning to herself. She seems very bent and old. She is poorly dressed but not ragged. In her hand she carries several bundles which have doubtless been removed from the market basket that is now tipped over her head.)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

SQUIRE. What a curious sight now! Like an old tortoise under his shell. Poor old crone, she thinks it's showering smartly, I'll wager. How ridiculous she looks!

DAME. Ooh, the wind! The wind and the rain!

(Dick, pushed by Pranks, runs forward and snatches away the basket.)

DICK. Ooh, the wind is terrible and the rain! Ooh, the wind and the rain!

(The Dame screams at this sudden accident. Her face, suddenly visible now that the basket has been removed, is doleful and terror-stricken.)

DAME. Oh, what a gust! My basket! My basket! I shall be drenched surely!

(Dick capers impishly before her.)

DICK. Only with tears, Goody dear! So dry your eyes.

(The Dame makes a futile little grab at him, but Dick and Pranks leap swiftly out of her reach.)

DAME. Dick, you devil-child,—to make mock of the old. *(She sees suddenly that it has stopped raining.)* Ah, if it isn't shining as if by magic! And you make fun of my blindness that can't tell whether it's rain or sun or day or night! *(She makes another grab at Dick and again he eludes her. The Squire, much amused, steps up to her with mock ceremony.)*

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

SQUIRE. A fine day, Dame Rackam! I beg to inform you that it is a fine day.

(Dame Rackam stiffens at sight of the Squire and tosses her head.)

DAME. Oh, Squire Scutcheon, it's yourself, is it? And you make mock of me too, taking part with a young scapegrace when he steals an old woman's basket off her head.

SQUIRE. It was but a harmless prank, ma'am.

DAME. A harmless prank! Oh, you are gentle with the young, but cruel hard on the old—cruel hard—*(Her voice squeaks plaintively and she has to wipe away a tear. The Squire actually winces and Warmth-about-the-Heart is seen laying a beseeching hand on his shoulder.)*

SQUIRE. I hope not, ma'am.

DAME. Hasn't your bailiff told me that I'm to be put out of my cottage and taken away to the poor farm only next week?

SQUIRE. Quite for your own good, ma'am.

DAME (*with rising spirit*). Quite for your good, you mean! Someone else can pay you a higher rent for the cottage than you could ever wring from me—

(With the Dame attacking him so fiercely from before and Warmth-about-the-Heart haunting him with appealing pantomime from behind, the Squire grows more and more uncomfortable.)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

SQUIRE. You misjudge my motives, ma'am. You are too old to be living alone. You said yourself just now that your eyesight was—

DAME. Ah, making mock of my words again! You'll twist things all ways to send me to that poor farm where I'll have nary jam on my cake for Sunday tea—but only poor food and black looks till the day I die.

SQUIRE. Ma'am, I assure you, you malign our charitable institution.

DAME. I only waste words begging you. What will I do without my old apple tree when it blossoms, come this very Spring?

(The Squire's misery is pitiable now, and Warmth-about-the-Heart makes the most of it.)

SQUIRE. Oh, I beg you, ma'am. It is indeed a sad case.

DAME. You're cruel hard if you can take an old woman to die out from under her own roof.

SQUIRE. Really I cannot listen.

DAME. And they won't let me take my blackbird with me when I go to the poor farm.

SQUIRE. Madam, it is a question of stern necessity. I deeply regret—Zounds, madam,—I—*(He turns away in agony. Warmth-about-the-Heart presses closer to follow up her advantage.)*

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

DAME. It's no use tarrying here to beg you. Here, boy, give me my basket and let me be getting on. It's few enough days I'll have left in my own house. Let me go back to my own doorstep where I may—
(Her voice trails off into doleful mutterings as she turns to find Dick. He and Pranks are standing under the May-pole, where during the conversation between the Dame and the Squire, they have been mocking both of them and playing tricks with the basket. At the approach of Dame Rackam, Dick steps tantalizingly back and the old woman hobbles into the circle after her basket. Immediately there is elfin music and Youth springs up and grasps one of her apron strings. Dick runs round the circle, keeping just out of Dame Rackam's reach, but she pursues him with amazing nimbleness, Youth following after. Meanwhile Warmth-about-the-Heart is prevailing upon the Squire to relent. Finally he strides up to the boy and collars him.)

SQUIRE. Give her the basket instantly, boy! You should blush, making the poor old thing run so. Here, Madam, is your property—and as to the poor farm—I am half inclined to reconsider—
(He restores the basket gallantly and leads her out of the circle as he speaks. The ghosts exchange delighted glances and Dame Rackam jumps up and down with excitement. Pranks and Dick, left in the circle, fall to digging worms for the fishing trip and leave the Squire and Dame Rackam to their less important affairs.)

DAME. Oh, Squire, you don't mean I might stay at the cottage! Oh, say I may! Say I may!

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

(*The Squire is open-mouthed with astonishment at her unexpected antics.*)

SQUIRE. Bless me, Dame Rackam, you surprise me, skipping about at your age. Isn't it past seventy you are in the church book?

DAME. Oh, but I feel like a girl at the thought that I might stay on at the cottage and not go to the poor farm. It's only sorrow and worry made me old. Seventy is hardly any age at all and I have great strength in me yet. If I'd thought it was dread of my age and weakness that was making you send me away, I'd have told you before I could well climb up on the roof to put on new thatch, myself.

SQUIRE. I should have been told of this.

DAME. But I thought it was for hope of higher rent you were sending me away.

(*The Squire is much distressed by this version of his character.*)

SQUIRE. How could you think so poorly of me?

DAME. You've been called a hard man, Squire Scutcheon.

SQUIRE. It pains me that such rumors of me get abroad.

DAME. I'll never spread another so long as I stay at the cottage! I'll think only of you as you look today with the pleasant glance in your eyes. It minds

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

me of a day long ago when you were walking by my cottage with your young bride. She had just come down from London and was new to country ways and wild to see the houses with straw roofs. Old Peter the fiddler, who's dead these many years, was sitting in my doorway playing Money Musk. And just for the feel of the music in my toes, I was dancing in the garden walk. Your lady saw me and cried out that she would like to dance too, and she opened the gate and flew up the path.

(The Squire has lifted his head and his eyes are bright as though he saw the vision of that day long ago. Warmth-about-the-Heart caresses him tenderly. But his lips are drawn with pain. The Dame notices his changed expression and nods sympathetically.)

Oh, I see you mind the time I speak of—

SQUIRE (*in a voice we have not heard him use*). Could I forget anything she did?

DAME. Yes, she was rarely lovely to think of, your lady, and always ready for fun. It was so till the very day she died. They say she was sitting at her window the very morning, telling stories to her boy, your son Geoffrey, and making him laugh, so he should not think too sadly of her when she was gone.

(The Squire's voice is husky with tears.)

SQUIRE. His joy was her first thought always.

DAME. Aye, and no wonder—a rare winsome lad Geoffrey always was—

SQUIRE. And is now, Dame Rackam—and bids fair, I trust, to be a fine man.

DAME (*hastily*). Aye, no doubt. He would be a fine man, of course. I wish I saw him oftener these last years. He's away now, is he?

SQUIRE. Geoffrey? Yes, he is up at Oxford. His progress there has been remarked on. He should have a brilliant future worthy of the house of Scutcheon. Yes, yes, Geoffrey is away at Oxford now. But he'll be coming home tomorrow for his holiday. If the weather is fair, we are to have a festival here on the green to welcome him home. Some dancing—some country merry-making such as he still seems to enjoy.

(*Dick looks up eagerly from his digging of worms.*)

DICK. A holiday?

SQUIRE. Yes.

DICK. Wheeeeeee! (*Dick and Pranks turn a few handsprings to show their satisfaction. Pranks is always just ahead of Dick in every action, but as Dick obviously cannot see the ghost, he seems to echo the antics by a kind of magic inspiration.*)

DAME. A holiday! Ay, that will be good. To see the young dancing. It will be bright weather, I prophesy, for my blackbird croaked three times this morning, which is his special sign for a clearing shower. Yes, there'll be dancing. I could feel to

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

dance myself! I'd remember the steps still, I think.
(She picks up her skirts and begins a gay country jig, Youth dances just behind her and the Squire nods and claps in time. Dick and Pranks watch delightedly.)

SQUIRE. Bravo! Good! Good!

DAME. I don't know what's in me today to make my bones so limber.

(Dick approaches, pushed from behind by Pranks. He holds out his hat gallantly to Dame Rackam who has paused in her mad jig to regain her breath.)

DICK. Look, now, what I've picked for you, the first flowers of Spring—my hat full of them.

(Dame Rackam looks innocently upon this tribute and then recoils with disgust.)

DAME. Worms! Ugh! You rascal! *(She chases him, but she is much too short of breath to come within reach of him. The Squire stands by, laughing heartily. The Dame turns to him in despair.)* What puts such notions into the heads of the young now?

(Pranks obviously could answer this question.)

SQUIRE. It's hard to say, ma'am. And I wonder too what gives women such a notion against worms.

DICK. Worms are good for bait, all right! The fish will be biting fine down in Swallow Pool.

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

SQUIRE. So they will! Just the day for them! Sun not too strong yet. Here, wait a bit for me! I'll go too.

(Dick is amazed for the second time at the startling new revelations of the Squire's character.)

DICK. Really, Squire, would you now? I never saw you fishing.

SQUIRE. Of late I've had little leisure for fishing. Grave concerns on my mind. But today I have a sudden whim to go with you,—a novel idea and pleasing. I'll have to stop at the manor for my rod. I wonder if I can find it now.

DICK. I'll meet you by the old willow.

SQUIRE. By the old willow. And remember—no pranks now!

(Dick looks all injured innocence. Pranks seems to wink from head to foot.)

DICK. Pranks! Oh! Not me, Squire! Hurry with the rod now! *(He runs out with his ghost still clinging to the red woolen muffler and mimicking his every step and caper. The Squire turns ceremoniously to Dame Rackam.)*

SQUIRE. Good day, Dame Rackam. I must be off. I'll speak to the bailiff about the cottage. Ease your mind of all—

(The Dame interrupts with tearful gratitude.)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

DAME. Oh, my thanks to you, Squire. I'm crying, I'm that glad. I'll run all the way home to tell Ripon —that's my blackbird you know.

(*The Squire nods sympathetically and goes amid the old woman's fluttering ecstasies. Warmth-about-the-Heart seems fairly to embrace him with her approval. Her hand is upon his shoulder as they disappear. The Dame continues to sway from side to side with her joy, chanting:*)

"Oh, the cottage! The cottage!"

(*Mistress Anne Hawthorne comes in. Love, left alone now in the Haunted Circle, sees her at once and all his adoration turns toward her. Of course he is invisible to Anne and indeed she seems scarcely to see even Dame Rackam at first, so weary and listless is she. She is young, and pretty in spite of her weariness. In her hand is the school book from which she no doubt reads the improving poetry which puts Dick to sleep. Dame Rackam spies her and runs eagerly to impart her news to a fresh audience.*)

Oh, Mistress Hawthorne, Mistress Hawthorne! It's a day of miracles!

ANNE (*hardly looking at her*). A day of miracles? Alas, Goody Rackam, I wish it were! A miracle would indeed be a relief from teaching sums and reading improving books to children who fall asleep.

(*Suddenly she looks into the old woman's face and is surprised by its expression of radiant joy.*)

Why, your eyes are full of tears! Has something really happened?

DAME. Oh, Mistress Hawthorne, Squire is to keep me on at the cottage.

ANNE. To keep you at the cottage! But you told me only yesterday that the bailiff had given you warning.

DAME. Ah, but something has made a change in Squire! I was never so surprised! Mayhap we have been greatly mistaken in him these late years when we called him a hard man! He is to let me stay on at the cottage! And I am not to go to the poor farm after all! I am not to leave my blackbird. I am to see my apple tree blossom this Spring!

ANNE. Oh, it is—it is a miracle! Dear Goody Rackam, I am so glad! It's good to have such news on this day when I thought nothing pleasant could happen. It was one of those days when everything goes wrong. I was so tired in school, for the children would be noisy, and I couldn't do one of the sums, and the improving books are so stupid, and Dick ran away,—and there are three more school days in the week. (*This accumulation of woes has swept her to the verge of tears. Love and Youth turn toward her pityingly and the Dame hastens with more practical comfort.*)

DAME. Haven't you heard that tomorrow is to be a holiday?

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

ANNE (*brightening at once*). No! That is a miracle! Why?

DAME. Squire's son is coming home from Oxford.

(*Anne's enthusiasm turns immediately to exquisite and restrained politeness.*)

ANNE. That is very nice.

DAME. Yes, he's a fine lad, Geoffrey. (I called him Geoffrey when he was only a little one running down to my cottage to fetch fresh eggs for the manor.) You wouldn't remember him, being a newcomer.

ANNE. I have seen him only once.

DAME. To be sure. He's away at Oxford most times in these past two years.

ANNE. He came to school last Spring to give the prizes for reading. That was a year ago. (*A wistful sigh escapes in spite of her. Love arises and stretches out his arms.*)

DAME. Well, you'll see him again for he's to come home tomorrow and there'll be a holiday. Dancing and mummers!

(*Anne lets her enthusiasm break forth again.*)

ANNE. A holiday! A holiday! You are full of news! And dancing! Dancing! Dancing! (She seizes Dame Rackam's hands and dances with her.

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

Youth capers after them, still holding the old woman's apron string. They whirl round and round and into the Haunted Circle. Immediately there is elfin music and Love rises, casting off the cloak, and taking Anne's free hand. Ghosts and mortals dance joyously to the fairy strains. Without the cloak, Love appears as a tall young man clad in gray. He presses close to Anne and whispers in her ear.)

LOVE. Stop dancing and listen to me.

(Anne turns wonderingly and drops Dame Rackam's hand, for Love is suddenly visible to her. At first, joyful recognition sweeps into her face and then incredulity and wonder. Dame Rackam and Youth dance on unheeding.)

ANNE. Who—who are you?

LOVE. I think you know. Your eyes welcomed me just now.

ANNE. But I thought you were someone else.

LOVE. No, for no one else loves you as I do.

ANNE. Then you cannot be he, though you look like him.

(Dame Rackam suddenly observes Anne's abstraction, and since Love is invisible to her, she is forced to put her own interpretation on Anne's drooping and puzzled attitude.)

DAME. Ah, I've tired you out dancing, I see. It

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

was that way in my young days: I could dance down every girl in the village. You'll see tomorrow. I feel it in my bones again. What with staying at the cottage and all—I must run home and tell the black-bird we are to stay. I'll look at the apple-bough too. The buds should be nearly pink. I didn't dare look before, but now—

(Anne forces herself to respond to this jubilance. She goes to the old woman and kisses her.)

ANNE. Dear Goody Rackam! I am so glad!

(Goody Rackam runs out with Youth skipping after her. Love comes close to Anne again.)

LOVE. Ah, she is gone and I have you to myself!

(Anne turns back to him, puzzled by the unreality of this apparition.)

ANNE. Goody Rackam was so excited she never saw you at all! Is it not strange?

(Love smiles mysteriously.)

LOVE. No! Not strange at all. The miracle is that you can see me, that you are here by my side at last! I have waited a year to have you so, with your lips parted to hear me, and my heart full of a secret for you. Ah, a year is a long time!

ANNE. A year? *(New confidence comes into her eyes.)*

LOVE. I see you remember the day we met.

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

ANNE. But no—it is impossible. It was only in a school room where one does not think of such things, and you have never seen me since that day,— and now they tell me that you are far away at—

LOVE. Do not believe all that they tell you! I am here at your side waiting to whisper the secret that you would not listen to this whole year.

ANNE. How could I know you were trying to tell me a secret?

LOVE. When you looked into your mirror you should have said to yourself, "Is there not someone who has seen me to notice that my hair is a web to catch all sunshine, and that a blue dress makes my eyes as blue as heaven? What would he say now? Did I look so lovely to him then?"

(Anne lifts her head haughtily, shocked at such a suggestion.)

ANNE. How can you think I would be so vain and foolish?

LOVE. Was it not vain and foolish to keep me silent a whole year?

(The pleading in Love's voice betrays Anne into eagerness.)

ANNE. Did it seem so long to you?

(Love sees that he has touched her at last.)

LOVE. Ah, my dear, your voice tells me that it

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

was weary for you also. Why did you not listen to my secret?

(Anne turns away blushing, for she sees that she has betrayed herself.)

ANNE. I think—I think—I did not dare—

LOVE (*triumphant*). That is because you had guessed the secret.

ANNE (*in surprise*). How do you know that?

LOVE. Because women do not fear secrets until they guess them. Till then they always wish to hear them.

(Anne is overwhelmed by his penetration, and Love is outrageously pleased with himself.)

ANNE. Oh.

LOVE. You see I am far wiser than a school teacher!

ANNE. But I don't pretend to be wise, and you have studied at Oxford.

(Love's glee is boundless now, for he has tricked her into a definite admission of his identity.)

LOVE. Ah, now you do know who I am! You have guessed all the secrets. Yet I will tell you over again for the joy of telling. I love you! I love you, and I have come back to find you. Ah, my dear, do you love me? *(He has her in his arms and she,*

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

giving herself up to this delightful and incredible dream, looks up into his eyes.)

'ANNE. I did not know it could be so beautiful to have someone love you!

LOVE. Did not all the romances you read promise Love would come this way?

(She smiles and disengages herself with exquisite dignity.)

ANNE. Yes, but I was too sensible to believe the romances. Real people are different.

LOVE. Because real people are tongue-tied and stupid and afraid of being laughed at. But Love is as the romance told you—gallant as a flag flung to the breeze, impetuous as the winds of Spring, full of beauty as a star shining in the heart of sunset.

ANNE (*with adoring wonder*). But how is it that you are different from all real people in the world?

LOVE. Because I am neither real nor a person. Most real people would never have seen me, but you longed so hard for a miracle that a ghost who was haunting you appeared for a moment—

(Anne scarcely understands but she is seized with a dreadful fear.)

'ANNE. Oh, I do not understand! Are you taking Love away from me?

(Love's voice swells with confident joy.)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

LOVE. No, for I am Love! But the real person is there!

(*Love points to Geoffrey who is just entering. Anne looks and then in amazement looks back at the spot where Love had stood. Love has stepped back and become invisible to Anne. She stretches out her arms to the place he has left.*)

ANNE. Where are you? Ah, I thought you were—(*She stands dazed and wondering as Geoffrey approaches. As soon as he appears, it is evident to the audience that Love has been taking his form. His clothes, even though not grey like Love's, are of the same fashion in every detail. Love is like his shadow. Beside Geoffrey comes another ghost, also in gray, but bearing a strange resemblance to Anne. At sight of this flesh-and-blood Geoffrey, Anne is frozen with dismay and confusion. Geoffrey too is plainly self-conscious, but he approaches manfully. The two ghosts go to each other like happy lovers.*)

GEOFFREY. Mistress Hawthorne, good day.

ANNE. Good day.

(*Geoffrey is hurt at this laconic greeting.*)

GEOFFREY. I see you have forgotten me.

(*Anne tries to make amends, but she is woefully confused.*)

ANNE. No—only there was someone here a moment ago. I thought he was—But of course that

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

was impossible, for you are surely Master Geoffrey Scutcheon. Oh, I don't know what possessed me to be so stupid. Surely I remember you, Master Scutcheon.

(Geoffrey is still a little stiff with resentment at her lack of cordiality.)

GEOFFREY. I came to school last year, you know, to give the prizes.

ANNE. Yes.

(Geoffrey is actually reproachful.)

GEOFFREY. I recognized you at once.

(Anne sees how she has hurt him, and makes another desperate effort to set herself right in his eyes.)

ANNE. Oh, I recognized you at once also—only—I was a little surprised. Were you not expected home tomorrow? *(To her delight, this excuse seems to satisfy him completely and he starts joyfully to explain his unexpected return. The ghosts, standing together behind Anne and Geoffrey, smile at their clumsy dialogue with a kind of tender and encouraging amusement.)*

GEOFFREY. Yes, the holiday begins tomorrow, but I couldn't wait, so I came today instead. I don't know what possessed me, but yesterday when I was walking, I passed a hawthorne tree at the cross-roads. A branch whipped across my face and I saw that there was a blossom on it. I picked it and put it in my button-hole, and do you know, I think the

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

flower bewitched me? For when I got back that night I could no more construe Latin than enter Paradise. I lay awake all night thinking, "A whole day before the holiday! A whole day!" (*He seems for a moment to have been carried away with some delicious dream. Then he looks at Anne suddenly and breaks off with a conscious little laugh.*) Really I don't know why I tell you such nonsense.

ANNE (*unaccountably breathless*). Oh, I like it. Thank you!

GEOFFREY. Do you believe in bewitchment?

(*Anne glances apprehensively over her shoulder for surely bewitchment has been very near to her. She sees no one, of course, and her bewilderment causes her to hesitate in her answer to Geoffrey.*)

ANNE. I—Yes, I think—I do.

(*Geoffrey is puzzled by her gesture.*)

GEOFFREY. Did you see someone coming?

ANNE. It was only—(*She cannot help looking again, for surely Love was there. This time she sees the Squire and Dick returning happily from their fishing expedition. Pranks and Warmth still follow them.*) Why, yes, indeed! Here comes your father, Squire Scutcheon, and Dick, who ran away from school today.

GEOFFREY. Father'll be angry at seeing me home a day early. He's a crusty old piece.

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

ANNE. I wonder where he caught Dick.

GEOFFREY. Fishing, I should say.

(*The two fishermen enter with poles flaunting and a string of fish dangling between them.*)

And Dad with a rod too. I haven't known him fish for years.

(*At first the Squire sees only Anne, for Geoffrey has not at once rushed forward for the parental greeting. In truth, he needs a moment more to prepare the necessary explanations.*)

SQUIRE. Good day, Mistress Hawthorne. Come here, Dick: stand up like a man and beg her pardon for playing truant. (*Now he spies Geoffrey and starts with amazement.*)

Eh! Why—why, Geoffrey!

GEOFFREY. Another truant, Father.

(*The Squire recovers from his first surprise and goes to Geoffrey with delight. He holds him by both shoulders and beams delightedly into his face.*)

SQUIRE. Well, well, well! Stand up like a man and beg my pardon, and we'll forgive both. Eh, Mistress Hawthorne?

ANNE (*demurely*). I shall try, though I missed Dick sorely.

(*Geoffrey looks enviously at Dick, who merely grins.*)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

GEOFFREY. I wonder if old Crammer missed me!

SQUIRE. Who may old Crammer be?

GEOFFREY. My Latin tutor. I am afraid he missed me sorely to do the translations for him.

SQUIRE. Rogue! You quite spoiled my plan, coming a day too soon,—before the feast and the merry-making were planned for. You were to be met with the blare of trumpets and the fatted calf.

GEOFFREY. But I was met by Mistress Hawthorne.

(He manages to suggest how infinitely this reception contented him. Anne blushes at his tone and at the memory of her very clumsy greeting to him.)

ANNE. I am afraid I didn't rise to the blare of trumpets.

SQUIRE (*fussily*). And the dancing—

GEOFFREY. We'll have that too. It's not sunset yet. Surely the boys and girls of Scutcheon will gather to dance without a day's warning!

(Dick springs to action at this suggestion.)

DICK. I'll tell them! I'll tell them!

SQUIRE. Well then, run! And tell Jack Potby to expect the whole village afterward for cakes and ale at the Scutcheon Arms.

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

(*Dick and Pranks rush off, almost upsetting Dame Rackam, who enters with Youth still at her apron string. The Squire springs gallantly to her rescue.*)

Ah, here's Dame Rackam again. Are you still limber for dancing? We are to have the merrymaking forced untimely down our throats by this young scapegrace, who runs home from college and will be welcomed whether or no.

DAME. And if it isn't Master Geoffrey! You've been growing again, I see. (*She shakes her head over him in a grandmotherly fashion.*) But as untruly as ever, it seems. What brings you home before the holiday?

GEOFFREY. Bewitchment. (*He looks at Anne with remarkable daring.*)

DAME. I shouldn't wonder bewitchment had done many things this day. Did you hear I am to stay at my cottage?

(*Geoffrey opens his eyes in surprise at this, and the Squire looks very uncomfortable.*)

GEOFFREY. I never heard you were to leave it.

DAME. Oh, yes, awhile back I was to be sent to the poor farm for my infirmities.

(*Geoffrey turns sternly to his father.*)

GEOFFREY. Father, what does this mean?

(*The Squire makes a deprecating gesture.*)

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

He looks like a boy caught by a stern constable in the act of robbing an orchard.)

SQUIRE. We won't speak of it, if you please.
There was a misunderstanding.

DAME. When he saw my dancing, he thought I
was not yet ready for the poor farm.

GEOFFREY. Not for a long, long time—and never,
Goody!

DAME. Pray God it be so!

(Dick and Pranks come racing back.)

DICK. They're coming! They're coming! And
Potby will look for you all at eight. He thought
at first I was tricking him! Me! But I showed him
I was in deadly earnest at last, and the cakes are
already in the oven to bake. Um!

(The villagers begin to appear.)

Look at 'em come! Even old Smutty from the forge!
I played him a good one, though! *(He is off on
the recital of some special deviltry but his voice is
'drowned by the chatter of the villagers who come
pouring in and greet Geoffrey heartily. The fiddler,
a worthy descendant of Old Peter, takes out his fid-
dle and the music begins. Streamers are suddenly
unwound from the May-pole and there is a gay dance.
Spring and her ghosts trip in to the music and a ghost
haunts each flying villager and circles round with him
in the dance. The spirit of gayety and abandon
mounts higher and higher. Geoffrey draws Anne out*

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

of the circle of dancers. Their ghosts detach themselves from the merrymaking and follow them. The music grows softer and one by one other dancers drop out of the dance, followed by their ghosts. They stand about the May-pole with their backs to Anne and Geoffrey and their eyes on the hardier dancers who have breath to go on.)

GEOFFREY. Stop dancing and listen to me.

(Anne's eyes widen and she looks about her as though seeking for someone. She turns incredulously to Geoffrey.)

ANNE. Who spoke to me then?

GEOFFREY. Why, I, of course—Geoffrey! What is the trouble?

ANNE. Only—someone else said the very same thing to me—just a little while ago!

(Geoffrey bristles with indignation.)

GEOFFREY. The impudent fellow! I hope you sent him packing!

(Anne looks at him in surprise and then sees his mistake and laughs.)

ANNE. How droll you are! No one but you asked me, of course. Only there is some strange enchantment.

GEOFFREY (*eagerly*). Do you feel it too?

(Anne nods solemnly.)

Yet you didn't meddle with a hawthorne spray.

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

ANNE (*shyly*). Perhaps it is because my name is Hawthorne.

(*This would seem a rather obvious remark, but to Geoffrey it appears to suggest startling and exciting connections.*)

GEOFFREY. Why, so it is! I wonder—if *that*—is why the flower bewitched me. (*He looks at her questioningly. The wonder in his eyes moves her to be brave and express her own wonder. She steps closer to him.*)

ANNE. Tell me,—when you picked the hawthorne spray—did you see anything, anyone, I mean?

GEOFFREY (*puzzled*). See anyone? Why no, I was quite alone.

ANNE (*disappointed*). I thought perhaps there might have been something—when you picked the spray, you know,—like a miracle.

GEOFFREY (*excited now*). But there was! How did you guess? When I put that sprig of hawthorne over my heart, I had a strange feeling that there was a hand touching me here. (*He takes Anne's hand and lays it over his heart.*) There, like that! Ah, I feel it again now! It makes a ringing in my heart like bells. I felt the same thing yesterday.

ANNE (*breathlessly*). Oh, Geoffrey!

GEOFFREY. And all night the ringing of those bells in my heart kept me awake and I lay thinking

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

that you were wearing the blue dress that you wore that day in the school room when I came to give the prizes. It made your eyes look blue,—as blue as—
(He stumbles awkwardly. Anne speaks as though in a dream.)

ANNE. As blue as heaven.

GEOFFREY. Yes, as blue as heaven! And the sun came through the school-room window and made your hair—

(Anne again completes his thought from the echo of her dream. She hardly knows she is speaking.)

ANNE. A web to catch all sunshine.

(Geoffrey looks at her in wonder.)

GEOFFREY. Yes, how beautifully you say it! I wish I could have thought of that—indeed, I did think of it, but I could not find words lovely enough to tell you. And now you have found them!

(Anne seems to wake to the impropriety of her conduct. She blushes.)

ANNE. Oh, you must think me very vain and foolish. It was not I that thought of those words. It was someone who came to me here and spoke such beautiful things that I shall always remember—
(She becomes dreamy again at the memory, but Geoffrey breaks in roughly.)

GEOFFREY. Someone else has been praising you? Oh, Anne!

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

(She cannot help smiling at this. He is stung to greater resentment by the smile.)

Now you are trying to make me miserable by telling me how much cleverer some other fellow has been.

ANNE. You must not be foolish, Geoffrey. If you only knew who spoke those words to me! Even I shall never know quite who he was. At first I thought it was you—and then you yourself came and he vanished away. And—he said, “I am Love, but the real person is there.” Was that not strange? Do you believe me, Geoffrey?

(From the way Geoffrey has been looking at her, it would appear that he had heard little of what she has been saying. But at her appeal he hastens to take her hands in his.)

GEOFFREY. I believe everything on this day of enchantment! And I love you! *(He kisses her rapturously. Anne looks up into his face.)*

ANNE. Oh, Geoffrey, this is even better than the miracle.

GEOFFREY. This is the miracle, Anne! *(He presses her close again and she nestles her face into his shoulder. Meanwhile the dancers have ceased, but the fiddler goes on and the attention of the crowd is centered on Goody Rackam, who is still dancing by the May-pole. Youth dances behind her, and the crowd of mingled ghosts and villagers applaud her splendid feat. Some are holding their sides with laughter over the quaint sight of the old woman's antics. Anne and Geoffrey are startled by a sudden*

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

burst of applause. Anne lifts her head from Geoffrey's shoulder and sees what has happened. Just then the Squire goes up to Dame Rackam and offers his arm.)

SQUIRE. Now, now, Goody Rackam! You'll dance yourself to death! Come, take my arm: you are puffing a bit, you can't deny. We'll lead the way to the Scutcheon Arms—and follow, all of you, to drink a health to my son Geoffrey, late returned from Oxford. (He looks about for Geoffrey, who steps toward him, holding Anne by the hand.)

GEOFFREY. Early returned from Oxford—by enchantment! (He looks at Anne.)

SQUIRE (*observes them with a new suspicion in his eye*). Eh, what's this! What's this now! Is there some joke to be played on me now? I think not. I think not! Your father is not altogether a fool, Geoffrey!

GEOFFREY (*abashed and a little alarmed*). Oh, sir, we never supposed—

(*Warmth-about-the-Heart is close at the Squire's shoulder so that there is no danger that he shall not beam upon this Spring romance. He fairly radiates cheer.*)

SQUIRE. *We?* Eh! Not altogether a fool—nor yet, a brute. Eh, Dame Rackam?

(She bobs a reassuring curtsey.)

DAME. Who could think, now, of such a thing?

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

SQUIRE. You will find me ready to forgive even truants and young men who take it on them to arrange their own homecomings very much to suit themselves. Will you and Mistress Hawthorne honor me at the Scutcheon Arms? (*He bows deeply and Anne curtseys and blushes. As the crowd closes in about them, Geoffrey grips his father's hand; Dick on the shoulders of the blacksmith is leading a rousing cheer.*)

DICK. Three cheers!

(*They all join him.*)

'Ray for Squire! 'Ray for Goody Rackam! 'Ray for Master Geoffrey! And biggest 'ray of all for Mistress Hawthorne 'cause she didn't get me birched for running away! 'Ray for Mistress Hawthorne!

(*Cheering, the crowd moves out, led by Squire Scutcheon with Dame Rackam on his arm and Anne and Geoffrey just behind. Spring and her ghosts are left. Spring stands under the deserted May-pole and the ghosts are grouped behind her. Love, Pranks, Warmth-about-the-Heart and Youth are back at their places at the North, South, East and West of the magic circle. The Ghost of the Hawthorne Spray has mingled with the other ghosts. The Crocus bobs up again and pushes the petals out of her eyes.*)

CROCUS.

La! How they were enchanted
Within the magic ring!
With joyous spirits haunted
Each clumsy human thing,
Mad with the joy of Spring.

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

Youth, Warmth, and Pranks among them
Unseen bewitched them well,
And Love, just guessed, has flung them
Beneath his magic spell
With charms too deep to tell.

(Spring holds out her arms to her four faithful ghosts.)

SPRING. Yes, the Crocus has spoken truly, though in poor poetry! What a mad, joyous place this little town has become tonight,—and all by the magic of my haunted circle. Pranks, what deviltry have you and Dick not done today! And Warmth-about-the-Heart, the Squire is yours from this hour! How your hands touched him and unwound the chains of ice that have bound him so long! Had it not been for the change you wrought in that old tyrant, even Youth could not have made Dame Rackam gay to-night! But la, Youth, what a dance you led her! I have not laughed so since the world was young! Can you keep her old bones from aching in the morning, I wonder?

(The ghosts, as she speaks to each, rise and touch her hand and pass by to mingle with the other ghosts. Love comes forward last of all and kneels at the feet of Spring. He is hidden once more in the gray cloak.)

LOVE. Have you no word for me, beloved of the world?

SPRING. Ah, Love, what word do you need, when you can see how even I thrill to your magic? Yours is the spell of all spells! Are you not both Youth

THE HAUNTED CIRCLE

and Warmth-about-the-Heart? Praise of them is only praise of you, after all! And what merrier jest could Pranks dream of than you devised when you left that bewildered maid and her lover to flutter in the net of your weaving? Even my own best magic,—the misting of green on my hills and the re-discovery of beauty in the heart of the world,—what is all this but yours? Is it not enough that the world looks upon Spring's highest miracles and praises Love?

LOVE. I am content. Your service is my badge of joy! (*He rises and presses Spring's hand to his lips before he drifts back among the other ghosts.*)

SPRING (*stands with head raised, exultant at Love's homage*). What Queen in all the world has so rare a service?

(*The Robin pushes forward, unwilling to be neglected in the distribution of praise.*)

ROBIN.

Oh, yes, I know it! Oh, yes, I know it!
But what is Spring without a poet?
But what is Spring without a poet?
(*Spring looks down at him and laughs.*)

SPRING. Oh, you poets are here, of course! And the worst of it is that you think yourselves so important!

(*The Crocus hastens to defend the sacred order of Parnassus.*)

CROCUS.

How should men guess your loveliness?
We saw you through your rainy dress!

SPRING. And nearly betrayed me! Yet a few poets, who only make Spring seem quite commonplace in their rhymes, cannot prepare the world against the potency of my charm. For it is so dear a spell that their hearts run to meet it whether they are old or hard, or young or scarce awake yet.

(*The Crocus paraphrases this immediately into a trite couplet and whispers it to the Robin.*)

CROCUS and ROBIN.

The hearts of young and old do thrill
When Spring comes tripping up the hill!

SPRING. Ah, I knew you would be talking of thrills before I could escape! Oh, poets of Spring, how well I know you! But lo! have I not haunted these folk with laughter and love enough to warm them for a year? I wonder, if I could stay on earth always, would Love and Laughter hold the world completely? Who knows? But we have begun well, my Spring poets! Shall we call in the ghosts and troop Northwards? I have haunted circles yet to weave!

THE GARDENER'S CAP

CHARACTERS

POCKET, The Gardener's Boy
CONSTANT, the Gardener
MADAM HEARTHWORTHY
PRUDENCE HEARTHWORTHY
SQUIRE PETER MAKEPIECE
THE FOLLOWERS OF THE PIPE

THE GARDENER'S CAP

Before the prim old-fashioned house of Madam Hearthworthy stretches a still primmer garden, neatly bisected by a well-weeded path. On either side of the path is a stone seat shielded by a screen of arbor vitae.

Everything is symmetrically balanced and laid out as though with a ruler, yet there lurks, even under its rigid discipline, the charm and loveliness that cannot be shut out of the most orderly garden when the graciousness of summer comes to it.

A little gardener's boy is pretending to rake the walk, but his languid movements show that the well-kept condition of the garden must be due to the energy of someone other than Pocket. He is a small boy, ridiculously ugly and freckled, wearing a gardener's smock whose pockets bulge with unguessed treasures. If one should hazard a guess, it would be that edibles were among his supplies.

Indeed at the moment he looks furtively about him and seeing no one about, takes from his pocket a large slice of bread and butter. He steps gingerly over the neat flower border and seats himself comfortably upon the grass to eat his morning meal with appreciative noises. Then happy and replete,

THE GARDENER'S CAP

he stretches himself on the grass and appears to doze.

Suddenly there is a strain of piping, which seems to echo through the garden as its very breath. Pocket does not stir: no piper appears: the garden seems singing to itself. Then there enters a tall lithe figure. His head is raised with the air of an eager listener drawn by an elusive melody. As he enters the garden and hears the full beauty of the hidden piping, joy spreads over his face and he stands transfixed with ecstasy.

He is tall and slender with a suggestion of deerlike grace. His dark, lean face looks foreign and un-English: perhaps in England they would call him an Italian! His clothes suggest no country or trade in the world. They may once have consisted of a loose green blouse and brown velvet breeches, but they have been so torn by the thorns of the world and so blown upon by the winds and rains of heaven that they might be a garment of bark and leaves. On his head is a curious shapeless hat, from which escape dark locks of hair. At present he has no name known to mortals, but as there is a very respectable name waiting for him in the garden, we may call him by that. When he speaks at last, it is half in reverent prayer, half in friendly greeting to the unseen piper in the garden.

CONSTANT.

Master of music! Piper of the world!
I hear your pipe again! Ah, I have sought

THE GARDENER'S CAP

Through alien fields where half-guessed echoes
 called,

Praying to hear the music that today
Came to me from this garden as I passed.
I knew that thrilling beauty for the song
That fled half-heard before me on the wind
And would not stay but ever led me on.
And so I followed, praying I might hear
The unloosed strain of joy that thrilled the Vale
Of Tempe when the weary world was young,
And I a happy listener at your feet.

(He pauses with head uplifted as though he saw the invisible piper. The memory of the Vale of Tempe shadows his face for a moment and he sighs.)

The world is old. Men say that you are dead,—
Yet I have heard your piping through the years
And follow, follow ever where you lead,—
To mountains of the dawn, to alien lands
Where I must dally in a strange disguise
Lest men should see your badge upon my brow
And bar the way that follows where you lead.
Today I heard your piping in this place;
Even in this man-made garden, with your breath,
You make a lost Elysium bloom once more,
And I may rest upon my wanderings
Knowing that you are near. Oh, master, stay!
Where are you? Here? Ah, here?

(He runs from bush to bush, eager to discover the maker of the music, but turns back baffled from the search.)

Not here! Not here! Yet you are everywhere!
Your breath has blown me through the world—
 a leaf

THE GARDENER'S CAP

Upon the winds of song—and I am driven
Where'er you will, following where you pipe,
Waiting in silences when you are dumb
To hear you pipe again. Ah joy to hear!
Pipe, pipe forever, master of all joy!

(He whirls in a transport of ecstasy and then dances about the garden ever more wildly as the pipe swells louder and fills him with a spirit of abandon and joy. Then as suddenly as it began, the piping ceases. Constant stops dancing and stands with head uplifted as though he listened for the renewal of the strain. Then the silence of the garden steals over him. Desolation and loneliness creep into his face. His whole figure seems to droop.)

The silence comes!
I am left lonely in an alien place
From which I dare not stray. Ah, pipe again,
And make Elysium bloom for me once more
Even in the man-made gardens of the world.
I wait upon your breath! I dare not go
Unguided by your piping. Where you lead
The path is strewn with stars! Ah, pipe again!
Tempe's own vales are dark when thou art gone!
Master!

(The last is almost a cry. Pocket sits up suddenly and confronts the intruder across the flower bed. His eyes widen with astonishment.)

POCKET. Hey, what? My eyes! Who are you now?

THE GARDENER'S CAP

(*Constant turns, equally astonished. He leans down to discover the speaker and at sight of Pocket, uncontrollable merriment breaks over his face, puckering the corners of his mouth with elfish glee.*)

CONSTANT.

Dusk of Olympus! Who am I indeed!

Is it Jove who asks my name and this his throne?

(*Pocket rises and edges away from the mocking obeisance which Constant sweeps to him.*)

POCKET. Look-a'-ere! Don't you touch me now! If you come meaning me harm, I can just look after myself! See! (*He rummages in his pockets, to Constant's further amusement, and brings forth a sling-shot and a handful of pebbles.*) My sling is always handy. You mind that! I'm a good aim with these weapons, too!

CONSTANT.

Why should you dream that I would do you harm,

God of the ready bow?

(*Pocket is a little ashamed of his flurry of fear.*)

POCKET. Well, you can't never tell, and I don't like your looks too much and you don't talk like anyone I ever heard talk before. And more than all that, what are you doing in Madam Hearthworthy's private garden?

(*Constant sighs.*)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

CONSTANT.

I was seeking something I had lost awhile
And dreamed that I had found—But silence
came.

I must wait until the pipe shall speak once more.

(*He seats himself on a stone seat at the right. He seems to take no further interest in Pocket but assumes a posture of hopeful and patient expectation. He might wait thus an hour or a decade. Pocket is by no means reassured by this development.*)

POCKET. He must be a lunatic, that's sure—talking about losing things in our garden, and looking for pipes. What am I to do with him now? I don't know! (*He plucks up courage to approach this intruder.*) Say, you know! You oughta move along from here. Madam Hearthworthy don't allow any idlers in her garden.

(*Constant turns his head just enough to show Pocket a whimsically raised eyebrow.*)

CONSTANT.

No idlers in her garden? What are you?

POCKET. Now you look-a-'ere! No talk from you! I'm her gardener's boy, I am, and a good right to be in her garden all I like. I'm Pocket, I am, assistant to the head gardener!

CONSTANT.

So! Where is the head gardener?

(*Pocket crosses himself reverently.*)

POCKET. He's dead.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

CONSTANT.

Dusk of Olympus! Dead!

POCKET. He died last night, he did, old Constant, as sudden as if he'd made up his mind to it in one day. Yesterday he was working in this path, cutting this very hedge—pruning that very tree—and now he's—dead!

(*Constant speaks musingly to himself.*)

CONSTANT.

Trimming hedges, pruning trees,
Making little paths run straight
Fencing all earth's mysteries
With a hedge row and a gate!
Yet he could not shut out fate
With his careful boundaries.

POCKET. What do you mean by that? Are you saying a prayer for old Constant? It sounds like you was saying a prayer for him.

(*Constant laughs lightly.*)

CONSTANT.

Prayers!
What profit now if prayers be said?
Have you not told me he is dead?
(*Speaks to himself once more.*)
And died ere ever he had heard
That piper's song that thrilled and stirred
The garden! Surely such are dead!

POCKET. Yes, he is dead, rest his soul in peace.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

(He grows aggressive once more, as he sees how unconscious of his presence Constant sits,—musing on the garden seat.) He's dead or you wouldn't be sitting there, I can promise you! He would have put you out of the gate before you ever came in it, he would. And if old Madam Hearthworthy—

(Even as he speaks her name, she emerges from the door of the house, a prim, dominating little figure, tensely strung to the task of setting her small world in perfect order. She closes the door behind her with triumphant precision and sets a resolute foot in the garden path. Pocket becomes rigid with terror.)

My eyes! Here she comes now! Run for it, you!
Run for it!

(Constant, however, sits as unconcerned as before.)

CONSTANT.

Nay, I must wait to hear the pipe again.

(Pocket gazes at him for one hopeless second and taps his brow significantly. Then as his mistress draws perilously near, he seizes his rake and begins combing the path with impressive activity. Madam Hearthworthy contemplates his zeal approvingly.)

MADAM. Ah, Pocket, at work as usual, I see.

(He stops at once, but only from profound respect for Madam's slightest word. He grabs off his cap.)

POCKET. Yes, ma'am.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

MADAM. Quite proper. One should not permit even such a sad occurrence as a death in one's establishment to disarrange one's routine.

POCKET. No, ma'am.

MADAM. At the same time I cannot deny that such incidents are disquieting. The death of one's head-gardener after forty-six years—it is forty-six years, is it not, Pocket?

POCKET. I have heard you say so, ma'am.

MADAM. Yes, but not quite forty-six years—forty-six years the first of next September. It would have been so orderly if Constant could have arranged to complete the year exactly to a day. (*She sighs.*) Yet his death would have been a shock at any time and one did not expect shocks from Constant. Constant was a most reliable gardener.

POCKET. Yes, ma'am.

MADAM. I cannot expect to replace him with anyone so satisfactory. Service, in these modern times, is far from reliable. One can take little comfort in it.

(*At this moment, Constant, who has been contenting himself with sly peeps at the old lady from his hidden seat, steps jauntily into the open. Madam Hearthworthy sees him at once, and steps back with a little cry of alarm.*)

Pocket! Who is this man? A stranger! An utter stranger! And in our garden!

THE GARDENER'S CAP

POCKET. I've been telling him all morning to move on, ma'am.

MADAM. A stranger! A vagabond! A gypsy—most undoubtedly a gypsy! What is your business here?

CONSTANT.

Lady, I have no "business" as men say—I came into your garden, seeking there—

(He pauses for a moment to find words that will explain his quest to this commanding little lady, but the word "seeking" has lighted a new gleam in Madam's eyes. She sees a chance of fitting even this gypsy into her orderly scheme.)

MADAM. Seeking?—Ah, you are out of work! You are seeking work!

(Constant makes an involuntary movement of repulsion.)

CONSTANT.

Nay, 'tis not work I seek, but—

(Madam Hearthworthy, intent on her latest plan, does not even hear.)

MADAM. How convenient that you are seeking work on the very morning of Constant's death! It seems so very—well-timed. On any other day this would be a superfluous intrusion, but now as it happens—

(Constant catches eagerly at her indecision.)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

CONSTANT.

Lady, you will not send me forth again
Out of your garden where I thought to find—

MADAM. Find work? Ah, yes. Uncouth as you appear, unknown to me though you are, I cannot think it unwise to employ anyone whose arrival is so exceedingly opportune. If you should prove satisfactory, it would set my mind free for other important concerns that weigh heavily upon it. Ah, you cannot guess how distracted I have been. It was a most unsuitable time for Constant to die just when my attention was so busied with Prudence's affairs. (*The last is hardly more than a sigh, the involuntary emanation of an overtaxed bosom. She turns half unconsciously toward the house and as if in answer to her thought, her daughter Prudence opens the door and stands looking dreamily into the garden. She is perhaps eighteen, but in her face is the intent, preoccupied expression of a child in a game of make-believe. Her gown too is of a make-believe world, a rippling robe that Guenivere might have worn when she rode to meet King Arthur on her wedding day. Her hair is braided in long strands over her shoulders. In her arms she carries a great book with a little silk book-mark dangling from it. At sight of her gown and her hair, her mother's figure stiffens with disapproval.*) Ah, there is Prudence now—and wearing those indecorous garments that she affects. I must speak to her at once. (*She starts toward her daughter, but is arrested by hearing Constant speak. He has seen Prudence, too, and is standing rapt in admiration and delight.*)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

CONSTANT.

A nymph, a goddess—clad in rippling robes,
Surely no mortal, but one imprisoned here
By woven spells within these garden walls.
Perhaps she too has heard the piper play
And waits to hear his music once again.
She, too, must be a follower of the pipe.

MADAM. Did you speak to me, my man?

(Constant starts at the brisk voice which breaks his dream.)

CONSTANT.

I only ask what is your will with me.

(Madam Hearthworthy turns back to him impatiently.)

MADAM. Ah, yes. I had forgotten you for the moment. I am unusually disquieted this morning. I do not know where to center my attention. Yes, my good man, you are to enter upon your duties at once.

(At the word "duties" Constant's eyebrow lifts suspiciously, but he stands humbly enough while Madam Hearthworthy continues.)

You may as well begin at once. There is a pansy bed on the east terrace that Constant was unfortunately prevented from completing by the untimely accident of his death. I do not like unfinished undertakings. Let your first task be to complete the pansy bed.

(Constant's face brightens at the prospect of this task.)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

CONSTANT.

Pansies! Ah, 'tis a joyous task indeed!

Flora, I am your votary today!

(*He starts to bound in the direction Madam Hearthworthy had pointed out. At sight of his buoyance she frowns and calls sharply to him.*)

MADAM. Wait!—I dislike precipitate action of any kind. Moreover, there is one detail not as yet determined. I do not know your name. You will have no objection, I trust, if I call you by the name of the old gardener. It would prevent disorder and confusion if I should call you Constant.

CONSTANT.

Constant?

(*He laughs.*)

Aye, call me Constant if you will!

I have had many names in many times,

But Constant—never that before!

(*It is evidently a source of great amusement to him. Madam regards his levity disapprovingly.*)

MADAM. No comment is necessary. Very well, Constant, Pocket will show you to the gardener's cottage and equip you with garments more suitable to your employment. Those rags you wear denote a very disorderly existence, I fear. You had best take one of Constant's old smocks. Your cap is more suitable. (*She regards it critically.*) But its place, I may remark, is not on your head at a time when I am addressing you.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

(At the very mention of his cap, Constant's hand flies to his head with a gesture of defense. But he does not remove the cap. Madam's head lifts haughtily.)

Let us understand these amenities from the first. Remove your cap.

CONSTANT.

Lady, I may not. In all other tasks,
I am your faithful servant, but in this
I hold my way—and wear my cap—

(Madam Hearthworthy becomes extremely agitated at this opposition to the discipline of her establishment.)

MADAM. What! Is this insubordination and insolence at the very start? I might have guessed when I employed a stranger. Oh, how very, very disquieting! *(She is so far unsettled by the strain of her extraordinary morning that her voice rises several pitches above its precise level of command and she is almost wringing her hands with distress. Her agitation actually attracts the attention of her daughter, who comes out of her dreamy trance and looks with amazement at her mother. She hurries down the path, the great book still clasped in her arms.)*

PRUDENCE. Mother, what is the matter? Why are you standing out here in the sun shouting at this strange man?

(Her mother looks anxiously at the sun, reminded of a new danger, and thereby her distress is greatly increased.)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

MADAM. Yes, in the sun! Very ill-advised, I am aware, but everything is disordered today. I am forced even to risk my health by these disturbances in my establishment. You are aware that Constant, the old gardener, died last night.

PRUDENCE. I know, Mother—Poor, dear old man.

MADAM. That was only the first annoying occurrence—

PRUDENCE. But one might have expected he would die. He was so very, very old. When we get a new gardener, let us have a young one and very, very handsome.

(Her mother gasps at such indiscretion and looks apprehensively at Constant to see if he has heard. Constant is looking straight at Prudence full of interest and delight. Nothing could be more agitating to poor Madam Hearthworthy. She turns to Prudence nervously.)

MADAM. My child! Hush!

(Prudence is too enthralled by the new prospect to listen.)

PRUDENCE. Oh, do engage a young gardener! Who knows what might happen then? Something romantic might occur in our garden at last. Do you not remember the tale of Queen Guenivere? She had a young and handsome gardener serving in her garden and he turned out to be a king in disguise. He

THE GARDENER'S CAP

took off his gardener's cap one day; and there on his head was a flaming crown! Old Constant could never have turned out to be a king! When he took off his cap, his head was quite, quite bald! (*She sighs.*)

MADAM. Will you cease talking nonsense, or must I send you into the house?

(*Prudence is still oblivious to threats, for a new vision beckons.*)

PRUDENCE. But now that Constant is dead—poor old dear—there will be a new gardener—and then, perhaps, the tale will come true! If only you will find a young gardener!

(*Madam, exasperated beyond control, grasps her daughter's arm and fairly shakes her into attention.*)

MADAM. Prudence!

(*At the name Constant starts as though he too had been recalled from dreams. He looks at Prudence with a curious expression of surprise.*)

CONSTANT.

Ah, surely Prudence cannot be your name!

(*His voice as he says it is thrilling. Prudence looks at him for the first time and finds his eyes searching hers intently. She draws a sharp little breath. For a moment they stand looking at one another. Then Prudence sighs.*)

PRUDENCE. Yes, Prudence is the name I am called by. And what do they call you?

THE GARDENER'S CAP

CONSTANT.

They call me Constant!

(*His face breaks into elfish glee. But Prudence's eyes are full of wonder and doubt.*)

PRUDENCE. I do not understand. How can you be Constant? Constant is dead.

CONSTANT. Ah, Constant, the old gardener is dead! I am Constant, the new gardener! Constant! Is it not droll! (*He plumes himself gaily. The wonder in Prudence's eyes changes to pure delight. She fairly jumps for joy.*)

PRUDENCE. You our gardener! A stranger! And young! Nothing so wonderful has ever happened in our garden before! It is almost like the tale of Guenivere coming true at last! Oh, I am glad! glad! glad!

(*Madam Hearthworthy, who has highly disapproved of their manner of introduction, is scandalized by Prudence's outburst of enthusiasm.*)

MADAM. Prudence! this behavior is most disorderly—before the servants! And your gown—I disapprove of your wearing that gown at all times, but today it seems especially inappropriate. It always looks to me distressingly like a night dress.

PRUDENCE. Mother! Before the servants!

MADAM. Oh, I had forgotten—I was quite carried away—quite beside myself. I have borne more

THE GARDENER'S CAP

than I should be asked to bear this morning. It is no wonder that I—Pocket, you are staring rudely. Close your mouth. Show Constant to the gardener's lodge at once and then take him to the potting shed where he may find the rest of the pansies to set out on the terrace.

POCKET. Yes, ma'am. (*He turns to Constant and as he does so sheds his humble manner and swells like a little turkey cock.*) Follow me, you!

(*Constant's eyes have never left Prudence. He is unconscious of Madam's agitation and of Pocket's impudent air of superiority. But he turns to follow as Pocket bids.*)

CONSTANT.

I follow with my heart new-winged with laughter.

For surely where such grace and beauty dwell
That strain of music which I know so well
Yet ever lose and ever follow after,
Will not be silent long—will rise and swell
And sweep me back into its mystic spell!

I follow with my heart new-winged with laughter.

(*Laughing happily and looking back at Prudence as he goes, he follows Pocket through the shrubbery. Prudence watches him, her eyes wide with wonder and delight.*)

PRUDENCE. What does he mean? Was he speaking to me? Was that a song he was singing? It sounded like a song, and yet—Who is he, Mother? (*She turns to her mother, who is also watching Con-*

THE GARDENER'S CAP

*stant's retreat but with a very dubious expression.
Madam Hearthworthy shakes her head.)*

MADAM. Dear, dear! He did not take off his cap after all. I consider it highly improbable that he will make a satisfactory gardener.

PRUDENCE. I think he is wonderful! I have never seen anyone like him, before. He looks as if he had traveled from a far-away land—his eyes are so star-like and strange! When he looked at me and said "Ah, surely Prudence cannot be your name!" I felt his eyes burn into my heart: I felt myself trembling as Guenivere trembled when her gardener boy took off his magic cap and stood before her suddenly crowned with light and she knew him to be Arthur, the king. Of course, Constant does not look like a king, but in the tales—

(Her mother interrupts at last.)

MADAM. Let that be sufficient discussion of Constant. It was inconsiderate of you to wear that gown on this of all mornings.

(Prudence, unabashed, leans playfully toward her mother, her finger on her lips.)

PRUDENCE. I am not Prudence this morning, Mother. I am Guenivere!

MADAM. That makes it all the more offensive to me. Why must you go about like a gypsy player pretending to be someone beside yourself, and someone who was far from discreet in her behavior?

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. Ah, but Guenivere was splendid, Mother! She may not have been discreet, but she was the queen of all romance. Minstrels sang her fame through far countries and princes made pilgrimages to seek her, and for love of her, King Arthur of Britain served as her gardener boy!

MADAM. Absurd! Foolish and indecorous proceedings!

PRUDENCE. But he longed to be near her and win her love. He did not wish to win it as a king,—to dazzle her with the crown of flame that bound his brow and had marked him from birth as Britain's faerie king. He wished to win her not as the son of Uther Pendragon, but as her lover. So he went to Merlin who gave him a magic cap to cover the crown that flamed always around his head and betrayed his birth to all who saw it. (*She opens the book to where the mark is laid.*) Listen, Mother, I was reading that very part of the story. (*She seats herself with the book on her knees. Madam Hearth-worthy makes a gesture of impatience. But Prudence does not even see.*)

“So Arthur sought the sage, Merlin the wise
And said, ‘Lo I am fain for Guenivere,
The lovely daughter of Leodegran,
But if I woo her as a mighty king,
It were no wooing: fear of my great name,
Or love of glory, or her father’s prayers
May win her for me, if about my head
I wear the mystic circlet of the king
That glimmers night and day upon my brow,

The magic mark of the Pendragons' line.
And Guenivere will see that badge of power
And, dazzled by its light, see not my heart,—
So hide my kingly crown!" Thus Arthur spake."

And Merlin set upon Arthur's head, over that magic crown, a gardener's cap! (*She turns to her mother with enthusiasm.*) Mother, is that not romantic?

(*Her mother tosses her head and sniffs disdainfully.*)

MADAM. Romantic indeed! How can you suppose that on this of all mornings I have time to think of romance?

PRUDENCE. But—to have a king serving in your garden!

MADAM. And if you have the slightest regard for propriety you will go into the house at once and take off that gown. Squire Makepiece, when he learns of old Constant's death, may come to express his regret and concern. (Squire Makepiece is always kind.) You would not wish him to see you in that indecorous garb—

(*Prudence looks up indifferently.*)

PRUDENCE. Why should I care in what gown Peter Makepiece sees me? If he does not love me in this gown, he will never love me at all!

MADAM. Prudence! You will be exasperating this morning. You cannot be indifferent to the fact that the Squire has already expressed an evident regard for you.

(*Prudence sighs.*)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. No, I cannot help hearing him when he professes regard for me in carefully-learned speeches once every week. Regard! But love is a very different thing! Peter's speeches never come to the part about love! He never gets beyond his regard and his ancestry and his estates. (*She sighs again.*) Sometimes I almost wish he would. Once I thought he was going to say something romantic—something that would thrill me with passion—he looked quite passionate for a moment and very handsome, but in his excitement he forgot what he had prepared to say! That was so like Peter!

MADAM. How heartless and indelicate you are, Prudence. It is trifling with your own opportunities to misunderstand the gentlemanly advances of so eligible a suitor as Squire Makepiece. You had best offer him every encouragement within the limits of propriety.

PRUDENCE. But I am not sure that I wish to encourage Peter Makepiece. Sometimes I almost think I do, and then—(*She pauses wistfully.*)

MADAM. What possible consideration can weigh against an alliance so obviously advantageous? So personable a man,—a Squire!

PRUDENCE. Ah, yes, a Squire! But an unromantic Squire—and I am waiting for a king!

(*Her mother regards her with utter hopelessness.*)

MADAM. A king! Prudence, your wilful childish-

THE GARDENER'S CAP

ness exhausts my patience. I am seriously tempted to—

(At this moment Pocket is seen returning. Prudence seizes eagerly on a pretext to divert her mother's attention.)

PRUDENCE. Pocket is coming, Mother. You were speaking rather loudly, you know.

(Madam Hearthworthy, never deaf to the demands of propriety, turns as Pocket enters, and Prudence turns her back with a little sigh of relief.)

MADAM. Ah, Pocket, you have shown Constant to the cottage and equipped him with suitable implements for the performance of his duties?

POCKET. Yes, ma'am. He's working in the pansy bed this minute. I showed him, ma'am. *(He struts with importance, and Madam Hearthworthy eyes his inflated aspect disapprovingly.)*

MADAM. Remember your place, Pocket. You are not head gardener, yet.

(At her tone, Pocket collapses immediately.)

POCKET. No, ma'am. I never meant, ma'am.

MADAM. Let your bearing suit your station at all times. Now continue your work. I myself will give Constant further directions. Prudence, go in and put on a suitable gown lest the Squire should call. *(Having thus ordered her little kingdom, the tyrant pauses a moment to watch Pocket pick up his rake and see Prudence start resignedly toward the house. Then*

THE GARDENER'S CAP

with a nod of satisfaction, she departs toward the pansy bed where new fields await her. But alas for her dreams of conquest!—Prudence has forgotten her book and steals back where it lies open at her favorite passage. She lifts it in her arms murmuring the beloved lines.)

PRUDENCE.

And Guenivere will see that badge of power
And, dazzled by its light, see not my heart,
So hide my kingly crown.

(The spell has reconquered her. She sinks back onto the seat and in another moment has sped on into the tale. Pocket too relapses from discipline. His rake moves ever more languidly and it is not long before his attention is diverted by something excessively interesting near the edge of a flower bed. He stoops to give it his undivided attention and his rake drops to the ground unnoticed.)

POCKET. A hop-toad! My eyes! And what a hop-toad! Biggest one I ever seed, now! Let's see how long your legs are, toady! *(He pokes him gently with a twig, reciting as he does so.)*

Toady, toady, pigeon toes,
Tap his knob and off he goes!
Billy, Billy, bandy-knee,
Hop if you're afeard o' me!

(This, however, does not seem to be the case, and Pocket drops to his knees to apply more motive power to the unimpressed toad.)

Hop, ye hump-hided beastie, you! Hop! Ain't ye feard? I'm a bloodthirsty man wi' a clout in my

THE GARDENER'S CAP

hand an' don't ye hop? Naw, ye ain't afeard. You have no spirit, you haven't. A frog with spirit in him hops when he's poked. Well, I'll wait right here, till the spirit moves you! (*He settles down comfortably flat on his back. Constant enters, carrying a little flowering plant with its roots ready for transplanting. He looks almost like a gardener now that he wears Constant's well-patched garden-smock. He sees Pocket and stops on tip-toe with glee, his lean, dark face wrinkled with elfish amusement.*)

CONSTANT.

Ho! Pocket, who was set to rake the lawn!
So mortals love to labor from the dawn
To the star-studded eve—they say!
They are all like this: they only love to keep
Their working tool beside them while they play
Praising sweet industry—but loving sleep!

(*He stoops to Pocket and shouts mischievously into his ear:*)

Pocket!

(*Pocket leaps up as at the report of a gun and springs for his rake. But Constant has set his foot upon it.*)

Tut tut tut tut! Boy! Must you have your rake
You are in haste to work now—all awake,
But for a sun's long step it lay
Right here beside you for your hand to touch:
You did not hurry then. Why now, I pray,
Pocket, do you desire your rake so much?

(*Pocket turns plaintively away from the mocking face so close to his.*)

POCKET. I—I just dropped down but now, sir,

THE GARDENER'S CAP

I—I had worked so long in the sun that I had to rest my back a little that was so bent my head was swimming like an empty bottle in black water. I just took a rest—

(*Constant laughs and kicks the rake away.*)

CONSTANT.

Show me the toad you stopped to play with,
The gallant, tilting toad!

(*Pocket's eyes widen at this unexpected clair-voyance on the part of the new head-gardener.*)

POCKET. How did you know it were a toad?

(*Constant stoops suddenly to the level of Pocket's face.*)

CONSTANT.

Your eyes, oh, boy! I saw toads in your eyes!

(*Pocket begins to cry frightenedly. Constant quickly sweeps him into a comforting arm.*)

Dusk of Olympus take me, if he cries!

Tut, Pocket, if you weep,

The toads that tilt within your eyes will drown.

Come, let me take a peep

At the real toad that made your rake drop down.

(*He drops on his knees while Pocket watches him, sniffing dubiously.*)

A gallant toad, worthy to make one stop

His gardening. Hi, fellow! Can you hop?

(*Pocket is won at last by this congenial enthusiasm for hop-toads. He drops down beside Constant and speaks excitedly.*)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

POCKET. Oh, yes, sir, he should, sir, if the spirit would move him; his legs must be uncommon long. But the spirit don't seem to move him. I was waitin' for it to move.

(*At this new version of the tale, Constant lifts his whimsical eyebrow.*)

CONSTANT.

I'll move his spirit for him, then—for oh, Pocket, until his moves, your own is slow!

(*He speaks to the toad as simply as he would to Pocket.*)

Cloud-gazing brother
With springs in your feet,
I passed a spot
In a hollow of grass
All sun-splashed and hot
Where a cluster of flies,—
Wings glinting like glass
And a thousand fold eyes
All buzzed in a knot,
Where some honey spilled sweet
From a lily-dashed cup.
You can catch them to eat
If you haste! Brother, up!

(*He has but to snap his fingers and the toad is away. Pocket is ecstatic and amazed at this new way of dealing with toads.*)

POCKET. Oh, he hopped! He hopped! See! My eyes, what legs! See! (He looks admiringly at Constant.) You're a funny gardener, you are!

THE GARDENER'S CAP

(Constant rises with a show of wounded vanity and brushes the dust from his newly donned smock.)

CONSTANT. I'm a very good gardener!

POCKET. It's not that you ain't a good gardener all right. But you have funny ways.

CONSTANT. What funny ways?

POCKET. Well, first, ye takes an interest in toads; second, ye don't baste me over the head with the rake handle when I—I stops to rest; and third, you always keeps your hat on your head, which is not manners; and fourth—*(He hesitates awkwardly.)*

CONSTANT.

Well, fourth! Dusk of Olympus, Pocket! Say How am I funny fourthly?

POCKET. Ye did it then, sir! (It's a trick you have of speaking.) Your words seem sort of marking time.

(Constant laughs a little sadly.)

CONSTANT.

Pocket, my words mark time in spite of me,
And 'tis not I am strange, but all the world
That clips and cuts and clutters with its words
Like barn-yard fowl! Oh, when the world was
young

All speech was music! I have not forgot.

(He looks about for a moment wistfully and

THE GARDENER'S CAP

then drops his head like one who despairs of finding something.)

'Tis men's words that fall strangely on my ear.

POCKET. So I say you're a funny gardener to speak like books. You sound like what my lady reads all day. She's over there reading now. Listen.

(In the silence Prudence is heard reading another of her favorite passages.)

PRUDENCE.

"And Merlin when he heard King Arthur's words,
And weighed them well, brought forth a gardener's cap
And said, 'Lo, set this cap upon thy brow
To hide the flaming circlet of a king,
The symbol of the great Pendragon's line.' "

(She pauses to taste the full romance of this incident. Constant's face as he has listened has taken on a new light.)

CONSTANT.

Her voice is like the lift of wanton wind
Under the branches. Surely she is one
Strayed from the golden vales of Arcady.

POCKET. She does read beautiful. I stops to listen to her read sometimes—when—when the dizziness in my head keeps me from working.

(Constant eyes him quizzically.)

CONSTANT.

You are over-fragile for a gardener's boy
Here is your rake and there is work to do!

THE GARDENER'S CAP

(He gives Pocket the rake and shoves him from the path with whimsical roughness. Then he turns to his own task. Pocket goes on with his languid raking and is presently out of sight among the bushes.)

But I myself forgot to work. See here!
(He holds up the little plant.)

This flower had a venturing soul
And strayed
Into the garden walk
And reared its little stalk
Gallant and unafraid
Where madam chanced to stroll.

“Pull up that flower,” she said,
“To throw away!”
It was too brave to blight
When planted here it might
Live out its day
And wear the crown of summer on its head.

(He proceeds to plant it in the grassy space near the screened seat where Prudence is sitting. She goes on reading, saying the words aloud to herself, unconscious of a listener. Constant follows the cadence of her voice happily.)

PRUDENCE.

“So Arthur labored as a gardener's boy
For love of Guenivere, but wist she not
He was the son of Uther Pendragon.
For that same cap which Merlin by his wiles

THE GARDENER'S CAP

Had fashion-ed hid Arthur, so none saw
His kingly crown. He seemed a gardener's boy.
And then one dawn did Guenivere look forth
Down from her bower and saw her gardener boy
Kneel down to bathe his face within the pool.
Wist he not he was seen, careless cast off
The magic cap and stood revealed—a king!
About his head the mystic circlet flamed
More bright than gems, more radiant than gold,
But like a filament of burning stars!
The sign and symbol of his kingly race."

(Prudence can read no further for pure delight.)

A king in her garden! How wonderful! *(She rises and pushes the book from her. Her face shadows.)* Ah, but that was long, long ago in the times when romantic things happened every day and a king might come into a maid's garden seeking her love. It is different today in our garden. Nothing romantic ever happens here. Our garden will be the same forever—even the flowers—all in the same places year after year—all in their proper rows. *(She has stepped beyond the screen and finds Constant surprisingly near. He is patting the earth about the roots of the little plant. Her hand flies to her heart.)* Constant! *(He rises at once.)*

CONSTANT.

Yes, what will you, lady?

(She turns away in a flutter of excitement.)

PRUDENCE. Oh, I have never been called "lady" before! And how strangely he looks at me! What can I say to him? *(She blushes before his intent*

THE GARDENER'S CAP

gaze and seizes upon the little flower as a pretext for conversation.) Why have you planted that little flower all by itself where there is no bed and no row?

CONSTANT.

It was not made for rows;
It had a wandering heart,
This little flower that chose
To dwell apart.
Poised in the path, it stood and waited so
To see you pass,
Until I brought it here where it might grow
Beside you in the grass.

(Prudence watches him as though he were some marvelous juggler who was whirling her little world in circles about his head.)

PRUDENCE. How like a dream! Flowers out of their places, a gardener who speaks poetry like the kings in tales of romance. Oh, where did you come from? Who are you?

CONSTANT.

Who but your gardener, Constant?

PRUDENCE. Ah, someone else, I know. *(Her eager gaze, hunting his secret, rests on his cap.)* If you were really my gardener, you would take off your cap to me.

(Again Constant makes an involuntary move to guard his cap.)

CONSTANT.

Why, lady?

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. I am the mistress's daughter. You should show me respect.

(*Constant falls instantly upon his knees.*)

CONSTANT.

Lady, I show it to you on my knees,
And swear it, yes, on Aphrodite's girdle.

(*Prudence lifts her head in triumph.*)

PRUDENCE. He kneels! How wonderfully romantic! And he will not take off his cap. What can it mean but that he hides his crown from me because he would win my heart by serving me as a gardener?
(*She assumes her most queenly pose and addresses Constant in blank verse as befits a queen of romance.*)

Constant, I pleasure in your bending homage,
But kneel no more! Behold, I bid you rise!

(*He leaps to his feet, not at her command, but for sheer joy at the rhythm of her speech.*)

CONSTANT.

She speaks song like the oreads who called
From vale to mountain in the golden age!

(*Prudence steps closer to him.*)

PRUDENCE. What do you say?

CONSTANT.

Oh, speak to me in music as you did
A moment since. It fills my thirsty soul
As water fills some roadside flower's cup
Raised lonely in the dust.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE.

Yes, in romance

All people speak in poetry.

CONSTANT.

When you speak
As with the rhythm of the Golden Age
I dream my search is ended.

(*Prudence's eyes shine at the mention of a quest.*)

PRUDENCE.

Oh, are you seeking something? In old tales,
They all seek something,—always go on quests!
Tell me, what do you seek?

CONSTANT.

The song that sings beneath the whole world's
heart.

I hear it and I run along the wind:
I lose it and I wait and dare not breathe
Lest it be lost forever.

(*Prudence draws back a little and looks at him doubtfully.*)

PRUDENCE. I don't understand. Why do you seek
a song? In tales of romance, they never are seeking
songs when they go on quests. They seek to gain
glory, or to do great deeds, or to win some maiden
for their heart's desire.

CONSTANT.

Those who have heard the Piper pipe his song
Can have no other quest in all the world.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

All glory is but echo of its breath;
Great deeds are fragments of its melody,
And all who hear it win their hearts' desire!

PRUDENCE. Their hearts' desire? It sounds like
a miracle!

CONSTANT (*his voice ringing with triumph*).

It is the greatest miracle of time!
You have but to hear, and all your heart can
hold
Of the world's beauty, mystery, and joy
Is yours the while you listen.
(*Prudence clasps her hands with delight.*)

PRUDENCE. Ah, if only I could hear it!

CONSTANT.

Ah, you may hear, for in this very place
The Piper of the World may pipe again.

PRUDENCE. Here? Have you heard him?

CONSTANT.

Ah, many times I have heard in many lands
And hearing once, I ever thirst to hear,
And follow—follow till I hear again.
I have no other quest in all the world.

PRUDENCE. Must you always wear your cap on
the quest?

CONSTANT.

I have learned that only when I wear my cap
Will mortals call me friend and let me pass.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. How very strange! Yet I have heard of such a thing in a tale. See, in this book there is the tale of a great king who wore a cap so that no one might guess who he was nor suspect that beneath that cap, his brow was marked with the magic symbol of his race.

(*Constant starts back, looking at her more and more strangely.*)

CONSTANT.

Ah, you have guessed my secret! Thus am I
Marked with the sign of a forgotten race,
And those who see it shrink away in fear!

(*Prudence is elate with triumph.*)

PRUDENCE. I knew it! I knew it! Ah, never fear that I would shrink from you. I would greet you proudly, for already I guess of what great race you come. (*She leans toward him and he seems for a moment about to reveal himself, then steps back doubtingly.*)

CONSTANT.

Almost I think that you would understand
And yet I dare not let you guess my race
Lest you should flee from me. Nay, do not
guess,
But call me Constant!
(*He laughs.*)

Ah, 'tis droll indeed
A leaf blown through the world on gusts of
song,
A wanderer beyond bounds of space and time,
Called Constant!

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. It is only Mother who wishes to call you Constant. She likes such names. She says they remind people to behave as they should. That is why she called me Prudence.

CONSTANT.

Prudence!

(*He laughs.*)

I knew that could not be your name.

(*She leans toward him mysteriously.*)

PRUDENCE.

All those that love me call me Guenivere!

CONSTANT.

Guenivere it shall be!

A fair name, yes,
But flickered through
With old unhappiness,
Like points of shadow
Darting into sun
Or choking silence
On a song begun,
Or twing of arrow
Where the red deer run.

Where lurks the sadness, I cannot explain
But in its beauty glimmer tips of pain.

(*He sighs, then laughs at his own sigh.*)
Guenivere it shall be!

PRUDENCE. That is well. But why do you say those ugly things of the name? It is a beautiful name, the name of a great queen. She was so beautiful that all the kings of Britain tilted for her favor.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

They sat their horses below her casement window
and bared their helmeted heads to do her worship.
(She looks insinuatingly at Constant's cap, but he seems unconscious of her hint.)

CONSTANT.

Surely her heart exulted in the sight
Like Aphrodite's with Paris at her feet!

PRUDENCE. Yes, for she was a queen and men would honor her. Now I—my own gardener will not uncover his head before me. *(She leans toward him eagerly. He retreats in alarm.)*

CONSTANT.

But, lady, you have had me at your feet
And may again for the asking,—ever that,
Or anything to serve you—

(She has turned aside, pouting a little that her carefully set snare has not caught her king of romance. The thump of a cane comes to her ears, and she turns back to Constant in a flurry of trepidation.)

PRUDENCE. Yes, yes, you can serve me. I hear Peter Makepiece's cane on the garden path. He would die of shock if he should come upon me in this robe, with my hair so. And Mother would be very angry. She told me an hour ago to change my gown lest he should come. Peter is so conventional! Hold him in talk while I slip into the house. Five minutes! *(She runs away as Peter comes into sight stumping his cane with the pompous ostentation ridiculous in so young a man. He is a handsome but*

THE GARDENER'S CAP

portly young Squire. His garb is exquisitely correct and only the flippant shine of his knee buckles and a very gaily flowered waistcoat betray that he has decorated himself rather recklessly for a great occasion. Pocket, rake still in hand, runs in just ahead of him and manages to whisper to Constant.)

POCKET. My eyes! here comes Squire Makepiece all togged out for his courting! My eyes!

(Squire Makepiece is upon them and Pocket wheels and presents a decorous and respectful front to him. Constant stands watching curiously.)

Good day, Squire Makepiece.

PETER. Ah, Pocket. I hear there has been sad bereavement—old Constant. I am hastening to offer my assistance. I shall find Mistress Prudence at home, I trust.

POCKET. Oh, yes, sir.

(The Squire would pass with no more ado, but Constant, true to his mission, edges in front of him.)

CONSTANT. Greeting, Squire Makepiece.

(The Squire eyes him with astonishment.)

PETER. Ods Bodkins, what a shock! Whom have we here?

CONSTANT. The new head gardener—Constant.

PETER. Ah! So? So? Madam Hearthworthy has been prompt in replacing old Constant—and her

THE GARDENER'S CAP

choice seems to me strange, I am bound to say. Hm! Well, my man, what can I do for you?

(Constant seizes upon any pretext for delaying the Squire.)

CONSTANT. Tell me the time, your worship.

PETER. Ump! The time? You laboring men are always anxious to know the time, so you can lay off work promptly, I'll wager. The indifference of the laboring man, I may say the indolence of the laboring man, is what is annihilating the land in old Britain. *(He takes out his watch.)* It is at this moment ten fifty-five to a dot—over an hour to lunch time yet, my man,—only ten fifty-five. *(He starts to go, replacing his watch carefully in the pocket of the flowered waistcoat. Constant gives an anxious look at the house, but Prudence has not appeared.)*

CONSTANT *(half to Pocket, half to himself).*

His sermon must have taken up one minute:
I'll hold him four to pleasure Guenivere.

(He steps after the Squire and lays a bold hand on his arm.)

Squire, are you seeking Guenivere?

(The Squire whirls upon him.)

PETER. What in the name of St. George!
Guenivere! You insolent rogue, what do you imply?
I know no Guenivere.

CONSTANT.

She said but now here in the garden path
And blowing toward me like a stalk of bloom
That those who loved her called her Guenivere
And Pocket says you love her.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PETER (*now whirling on the unlucky Pocket*).
Pocket! This comes of servants' gabble! Vulgar
tongues clacking with the business of their betters!
Pocket! Who is Guenivere?

(*Pocket's eyes fairly protrude with innocence.*)

POCKET. Indeed, sir, I never said, sir—

PETER (*to Constant*). So, Fellow. Pocket denies
it! What have you to say now?

CONSTANT.

Only she said

That those who loved her called her Guenivere.

PETER. Who said?

CONSTANT.

Why, Mistress Prudence, I have heard her
called.

(*Peter's astonishment keeps him dumb for a
moment. Then he starts off hastily, spluttering
with rage.*)

PETER. My man, your insolence is unbearable—I
—the working class—the land—Let me pass—
Guenivere, indeed!

(*Constant is blocking his way with surprising
agility and keeping an anxious eye on the door
of the house.*)

CONSTANT.

Before you go, I ask to know the time.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PETER. Time! Zounds! Is there no limit to your impertinence? Let me pass at once.

(*The clock strikes eleven. Constant laughs with relief and bounds out of the Squire's path.*)

CONSTANT.

Five minutes have gone by! Your hour has come!

Your pardon, Squire Makepiece, pray go in
To Mistress Prudence. She's awaiting you
Anxiously.

(*This news actually moderates the Squire's wrath. He turns to Constant eagerly.*)

PETER. What! Did she say so?

CONSTANT.

Nay, but I saw her run
Quick as a quill shot from a porcupine
Into a screen of foe-concealing leaves.
She ran to be prepared when you should come.

(*Constant sweeps him a generous bow. The Squire stands for a moment in the path, his handsome face bright with the good news he has so unexpectedly received.*)

PETER. She will be glad to see me! Dear, dear!
That is good news! (He turns to Pocket and Constant with a sudden geniality.) Here, boy, a sixpence for one of your capacious pockets. And one for you, my worthy fellow. I mistook your good-hearted interest in my courtship for impudence. One is sometimes hasty. She will be glad to see me—

THE GARDENER'S CAP

(*He hastens on with new anticipation toward the house. Constant looks after him with a droll smile and tosses up the sixpence.*)

CONSTANT.

So, Guenivere, your servant is repaid!
Pocket, five minutes may be aeons long!
(*Pocket looks at him dubiously.*)

POCKET. Yes, sir.

CONSTANT.

Five minutes brought us wealth! We work no more.

Let us hunt hop-toads all the live-long day.

(*He bounds off into the garden and Pocket, hesitant between delight and misgiving, follows. Peter is about to lift the door knocker, but Madam Hearthworthy herself opens the door.*)

PETER. Ah, Madam Hearthworthy, how do you find yourself? Not too seriously affected by the lamentable death of your old gardener, I hope.

MADAM. Unfortunately, Squire, I am more seriously affected than I have ever been in my life. My routine seems discommoded beyond repair,—and even my health!—I have been standing bare-headed in the sun!

PETER. Madam! You must take the utmost care—

THE GARDENER'S CAP

MADAM. Yes, it has been my rule to take the utmost care of my health. It is my duty to poor Prudence.

PETER (*embarrassed*). Yes, to be sure.

MADAM. You know I feel I have no right to die.

PETER. Oh, I hope not! Ods bods—that is—certainly you don't talk of dying at your time, Madam Hearthworthy.

MADAM. Ah, I have had indications. You cannot know! (*She sighs and puts a trembling hand to her heart.*) But I must keep myself about till Prudence is settled.

PETER. Oh, Madam, if I could only persuade her to settle down with me!

MADAM. Then I could die immediately!

PETER (*horrified*). Oh, no! Not my meaning at all! Ods Bodkins, no! Far from it!

MADAM. There is a time and place for everything, Squire, and it will be a fitting time for me to die when Prudence is married. So orderly and convenient! Quite appropriate! (*She nods with satisfaction. But Prudence startles her by bursting out of the house in a whirl of dainty and demure ruffles, just in time to hear her mother's last words.*)

PRUDENCE. What is quite appropriate, Mother?

THE GARDENER'S CAP

(*Madam puts her hand to her heart for one fluttering moment and then recovers her superb self-command.*)

MADAM. Appropriate for you to walk in the garden with the Squire. Entirely! Go and see if the new pansy bed I told Constant to set on the east terrace is orderly and pleasant to see. I hope Constant is a skilful gardener.

PETER. He is an extraordinary fellow at any rate. Unique manners, but good-hearted—good-hearted. (*He cannot resist a hopeful look at Prudence as he reflects on the goodness of Constant's heart. Prudence misinterprets the look, perhaps wilfully.*)

PRUDENCE. He is no commonplace gardener. Have you noticed that he speaks in poetry?

PETER. Er—er, you know, Mistress Prudence, I'm not very well acquainted with poetry.

PRUDENCE (*haughtily*). I thought you might have noticed the difference between his speech and Pocket's!

PETER. Well, Pocket's in my estimation is rather more decorous and becoming.

MADAM. Oh, Squire, do you think, too, that Constant is indecorous? I feared it. I feared it. I shall have to make another change. These changes are so disquieting.

(*Prudence seizes her mother's arm.*)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. Oh, Mother—no! He is the most courteous gardener I ever saw—the most polite—far above the station of a gardener. Indeed, how far I can only guess! We must keep him.

MADAM. If you imply that there is anything mysterious about him, he had best leave at once. Mystery is so indiscreet.

(The Squire's eyes are on Prudence's eager face.)

PETER. To Mistress Prudence, I perceive, mystery is less distasteful.

(She hears a note in his voice which she takes for sympathy and catches at it eagerly.)

PRUDENCE. Oh, yes, Squire, you understand. Living near mystery is like living in a tale. At any moment the trumpets may blow and the humblest servant may become a king with a crown of gold. You too have longed for mystery and romance, to forget order and appropriateness—to be disquieting and indecorous and indiscreet!

(Madam Hearthworthy is scandalized at this outburst against her most cherished canons. Peter is a little uncomfortable also. He pats Prudence's hand nervously.)

PETER. Oh, Mistress Prudence, I hope I shall never be indiscreet.

PRUDENCE. Oh, Peter! I thought for a moment you could understand!

THE GARDENER'S CAP

MADAM (*significantly, to Peter*). You see why I must live on!

PETER. Surely, Madam—(*He has never been more uncomfortable. Prudence pulls away from him crossly.*)

PRUDENCE. Oh, you two can stay and be discreet together—quiet—appropriate—orderly! I began an adventure today and I shall follow it—into the garden—(*She starts down the path giddily, but Peter steps after her.*)

PETER. Let me offer my arm, Mistress Prudence. (*She draws away.*)

MADAM. Prudence, you are most rude and—in-delicate.

PETER. If only I may be permitted, Mistress Prudence.

(*She submits with a little sigh and Peter and Madam look happy once more. Peter bends adoringly toward her as he escorts her down the path. Madam, immensely relieved, goes into the house again.*)

Your poetic gardener told me you would be glad to see me today. Do not disappoint me.

PRUDENCE. You wouldn't be disappointed if you had not expected so much. Indeed, I don't know what Constant meant.

PETER. He based his assumption, it seems, on
[101]

THE GARDENER'S CAP

having observed you hastening to prepare for my coming—like—like a porcupine, I believe he said. The comparison struck me as odd, but it led me to expect—to hope fervently—

PRUDENCE. But a porcupine! Peter, you couldn't have heard correctly.

(Peter is willing to grant anything that will make the way smooth for his hopes. And Prudence is looking far from pleased.)

PETER. Possibly not—the comparison struck me as odd at the time, but it led me to expect—to hope fervently—Ah, Mistress Prudence, if you would listen to my suit.

(She turns away from him and sits wearily on the garden seat.)

PRUDENCE. Peter, I have listened to it for hours at a time.

PETER. I have tried to acquaint you with the points in favor of our union. We come of two distinguished lines of ancestry.

PRUDENCE. I know. Our grandsires were knights, even barons! The books are full of their glorious deeds: I have read them all. But that was long, long ago. Nowadays the Hearthworthy and the Makepiece families are utterly commonplace. They do not care. They wish to be commonplace. But I—I wish—

(Peter breaks in upon her wistful pause with unwonted quickness.)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PETER. What can you wish that I will not bestow upon you? A name of eminent respect—a mansion of no inconsiderable size and beauty—the wealth of the Makepiece family to convert into your heart's desires—a life of safety and comfort—

(*Her face has softened, but at this last phrase it hardens again.*)

PRUDENCE. Ah, but my heart's desire is not for safety and comfort.

PETER. What do you mean? You cannot wish to be uncomfortable!

PRUDENCE. No, but mere safety and comfort is so unromantic! I long for romance and mystery and adventure. I want to be loved by a king who would seek through the world for me and scorn no labor by which he might win my heart,—even to serving humbly in my garden.

PETER. But, my dear, such romantic situations are most unlikely to occur in these present times. You cannot expect—

PRUDENCE (*more to herself than to Peter*). I know. I had almost lost hope but today I found the promise of romance and adventure at last.

PETER. Romance and adventure? I don't understand.

PRUDENCE. No, Peter, you don't understand in the least. Sometimes I think that, though you have

THE GARDENER'S CAP

seen me since I was a child, you know nothing of me at all. You see only my disguise—this stupid ruffled gown, this decorous hair! You call me Mistress Prudence, but when a king comes courting me, he will call me by my true name—the name of a great queen. (*She rises from the seat. At the same moment Constant enters through the shrubbery, but he is concealed from Prudence and Peter by the screen behind the garden seat. Peter rises too, ruffling his neatly queued hair with a troubled hand. Prudence walks away from him, her head lifted dreamily.*) Perhaps the king has come at last! (*She steps out of the shelter of the screen and finds herself confronted by Constant. She cries out in surprise for he seems an answer to her thought.*) Constant! I thought you were on the east terrace making the pansy bed.

CONSTANT.

Ah, yes, I made it,
Lavender and cool
Like a deep purple pool
Of shadow where a tree's boughs almost rest
On a too sunny meadow's golden breast.
So in the garden
Pansy shadows throng
Under their little faces stirs the breeze.
And sets them all along
Trembling in little lifting ecstasies.
(*Prudence is enchanted.*)

PRUDENCE. O-oh! (*She turns to Peter.*) Do you hear him, Peter?

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PETER. I hear him, but I am quite at a loss to know what he is talking about. I suppose he is speaking poetry.

PRUDENCE (*stiffly*). He is telling me that he has finished the pansy bed.

PETER. Ods Bodkins! No more than that!

PRUDENCE. No more than that! (*But she sighs romantically to indicate how much, much more she has found in Constant's words. Peter feels himself at a disadvantage between these two romantic beings. He offers his arm to Prudence and dismisses Constant with a look. Constant is mischievously blind to the signal.*)

PETER. Then, Mistress Prudence, we can continue our stroll. (*He looks haughtily at Constant to indicate once more that he is dismissed. Constant steps aside with a sweeping bow—to Prudence.*)

CONSTANT. Your pardon, Guenivere. I bar your way.

(*At this name, light breaks upon Peter's mind, but it does not serve to make him more tolerant of Constant's presence.*)

PETER. Guenivere! That name again! What does the rogue mean with his "Guenivere"?

PRUDENCE. He calls me by my true name, the name of a great queen.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PETER. I find his manner insolent and offensive!
Out of our way, you hulking—

PRUDENCE. Peter, beware!

PETER. By the Sword of St. George! Beware of
what, pray?

PRUDENCE. You do not know to whom you speak!

PETER. What? Not know—an insolent gardener
who does not keep his own place, who addresses his
mistress by familiar names and stands blocking the
path of his betters with a cap on his head—

*(Constant's hand flies again to his cap, but
not to remove it.)*

You must be reminded, sirrah, to 'doff your cap. Off
with it, man!

CONSTANT.

Nay, Squire, I wear my cap forever, here.

PETER. You dare to answer me! Insufferable!
Remove your cap!

PRUDENCE. Oh, when you see him without his
cap, you will know him for what he is—no mere
gardener to take our orders!

PETER. I do not know what you mean—but I do
know that this man must remove his cap.

*(Constant still stands with an expression half
of apprehension, half of amusement, playing
over his face. Prudence appeals to him
eagerly.)*

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. Will you not, Constant, for my sake?
Oh, I long to have Peter see you as you really are.
He will not believe that romance is come into our
garden; but I believe. Let me see you as you are!

CONSTANT.

Nay, if you saw me as I am, I fear
I might never serve within your garden more.
Wearing my cap, I pass unchallenged through
A world where I must drift on strains of song
Now heard, now lost again—but ever sweet.
(Prudence sighs with disappointment, but Peter is thoroughly angry.)

PETER. We do not ask for poetry but for obedience. Remove your cap!

CONSTANT.

I wear it always! 'Tis a game of mine!

PETER. Well, 'tis a game played to the end now!
(He lifts his cane to knock the offending cap from Constant's head. Constant leaps back like a young deer. Peter pursues with determination. There is a mad chase 'round the garden.)

PRUDENCE. Oh, what have I done! *(She runs off into the shrubbery as Peter's cane comes perilously near the cap. Then with a deft movement, Constant trips Peter and he falls heavily. Constant stands over his prostrate foe for one gleeful moment.)*

CONSTANT.

At least my cap is safe upon my head!

THE GARDENER'S CAP

(He runs laughing into the shrubbery. Peter rises stiffly, brushing the dust from his clothes and muttering "Ods Bodkins! Indeed!" at panting intervals. The discovery that he has lost one of his knee buckles in the scramble sends him grovelling again and so he is found by Madam Hearthworthy.)

MADAM. Squire Makepiece! Has anything untoward occurred?

PETER. Untoward indeed! I have lost my silver knee-buckle!

MADAM. Where is Prudence?

PETER (*who is still searching*). I do not know, Madam. But here at least is the knee-buckle. (*He replaces it, muttering angrily to himself:*) An outrage! Impudent fellow!

(Madam Hearthworthy goes to him with determination.)

MADAM. Squire Makepiece, what has occurred?

PETER. I scarcely know how to tell you, Madam, nor how you will believe me when I state that your new gardener refused even when I plainly requested him—to take off his cap in the presence of myself and Mistress Prudence.

MADAM. There! I suspected there would be trouble with the new gardener. And now that I come to think of it, he refused in the same uncouth

manner this morning when I requested him to remove his cap. I should have insisted further but Prudence came out and distracted my attention. Refused to remove his cap! Such behavior is sufficient cause for your state of mind.

PETER. But that is far from the whole matter, Madam.

MADAM. You cannot mean that worse insolence followed! Impossible!

PETER. Little as you may credit it, my feelings of disgust so far overcame me that I tried by force to remove the fellow's cap—and he actively resisted.

MADAM. 'Tis past belief!

PETER. And a vulgar scuffle followed.

MADAM. In my garden!

PETER. And the fellow—being extremely nimble—succeeded in tripping me up,—

MADAM. Squire!

PETER. So that I fell prostrate.

MADAM. I cannot survive the recital of such indecencies. Pocket! (*She claps her hands and Pocket instantly appears.*)

POCKET. Yes, ma'am.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

MADAM. Find Constant and tell him to present himself at the house in half an hour.

POCKET. Yes, ma'am. (*He starts to go, his eyes bulging.*)

MADAM. And, Pocket—

(*He turns back dutifully.*)

POCKET. Yes, ma'am.

MADAM. Tell Constant that I wish his hands to be quite clean before he presents himself. A gardener's hands are too frequently soiled.

POCKET. Is that all, ma'am?

MADAM. That is all, Pocket.

(*Pocket turns to go but cannot repress an ejaculation.*)

POCKET. My goggle eyes! (*He goes. Madam turns resignedly to the Squire.*)

MADAM. A disagreeable duty, Squire, but one which my indignation over the injuries you have suffered gives me strength to perform. I have never had to discharge a gardener before.

PETER. I greatly regret that it should be on my account, Madam.

MADAM. Not entirely on your account, Squire. I feared Constant would prove unsatisfactory from the

THE GARDENER'S GAP

first. His conduct throughout has been indecorous. I will go in and compose myself for the interview.

PETER. Good morning, Madam Hearthworthy. I beg you to make my respectful farewells to Mistress Prudence.

MADAM. I will call her. She should have remained.

PETER (*hastily*). No, no! Madam Hearthworthy, another time.

MADAM. I cannot think why she retired at such a moment.

PETER. Natural maidenly timidity, no doubt. My respectful good morning to her.

MADAM. Good morning, Squire Makepiece.

(*The Squire departs with a charming bow to Madam Hearthworthy and leaves her standing in the pathway fairly wringing her hands.*)

Oh, this is all most disquieting! Where can a creature with such manners as Constant possesses possibly come from? I am at a loss to tell! (*Sighing over the mystery, she goes into the house. Pocket returns at the same moment but Madam is already entering the house and does not see him. Prudence, however, comes in from the other side of the garden, and looks around her. She sees Pocket and seizes him eagerly.*)

PRUDENCE. Pocket!

(*Pocket jumps violently at this sudden attack from an unexpected quarter.*)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

POCKET. My goggle eyes! Mistress Prudence! Things is sudden today!

PRUDENCE. Where is Constant?

POCKET. Down at the gardener's lodge he is, miss, washing his hands!

(*Prudence's hand flies to her heart.*)

PRUDENCE. Washing his hands? You don't mean—?

POCKET. Yes, miss, I do—Madam has sent for him. Why else should he be washing his hands?

PRUDENCE. Then without doubt she is going to discharge him.

POCKET. I should s'pose so, miss. I chanced to hear her say as much to the Squire.

PRUDENCE (*to herself*). Poor Peter, he must come back and convince Mother that it was all an accident. (*She turns to Pocket.*) Pocket, run after the Squire and tell him Mistress Prudence craves him to return to hear something she urgently desires to say to him—with all her heart. Will you tell him, Pocket?

POCKET. Yes, miss! My eyes, now! Such things was never known in the garden in old gardener's time. (*He goes out rolling his eyes over the momentous nature of his message. Prudence clasps her hands over her heart.*)

PRUDENCE. Oh, he must come!

(*Constant enters, looking very decorous and solemn in comparison to the mischievous creature who tripped up the Squire. Prudence turns, her hands still clasped over her heart, and sees him. She draws in a little breath of excitement.*)

Constant!

(*He holds out mute hands for forgiveness, and she sees that they are spotless.*)

You have washed your hands.

(*He laughs.*)

CONSTANT.

Lady, I had commands.

(*To Prudence it is no matter for laughter. She looks at him gravely.*)

PRUDENCE. Do you know what it means when Mother tells you to wash your hands and present yourself at the house?

CONSTANT. I have guessed. She will order me to go forth from the garden.

PRUDENCE. Yes, she will send you away. (*She looks at him with forlorn appeal.*) And I do not want you to go. (*She hangs her head and walks across to the garden seat on the right of the path. Constant follows her, eager to reassure her.*)

CONSTANT.

Nay, fear not I shall go, until the pipe
Has spoken. It has led me to this place

THE GARDENER'S CAP

And till it calls me forth I needs must stay
And listen, breathless for its ecstasy.
Master of Music! Pipe, ah, pipe to me!

(He turns away from Prudence now and seems praying with all his soul to the piper who has deserted him.)

I lie entangled in a world of men
Who bind me with their nets of little rules
And give me scornful words and mock at me!

(He stretches out his arms.)

Ah, pipe me forth upon the path of stars:
Ah, pipe me to the mountain-tops of dawn!
For, lo, until I hear your pipe again
I must lie hidden in this alien place
I dare not tarry here in open joy
Nor go my way in peace! I wait your call.

(He stands with hands uplifted but no call comes. Prudence has turned to listen to him and her face is full of wonder.)

PRUDENCE. You will hide here? You will not go?

(Constant turns back to her. His arms drop to his sides with despair at the piper's silence, but his face is determined and his voice steady.)

CONSTANT. I stay until I hear the pipe again.

PRUDENCE. But Mother! She will order you from the garden. You will never dare disobey Mother! Everyone obeys Mother's rules in the end.

CONSTANT.

Rules! Rules! Ah, what are rules to me?

THE GARDENER'S CAP

Gardeners make rules and, careless, flowers
break them.

Mortals make rules and living hearts forsake
them.

And seek their beauty where the path is free.

(*It takes very little of this magical doctrine
to infect Prudence.*)

PRUDENCE. Yes, you are right. I have often said,
myself, that some day I should be free of the rules,
—no longer to take commands and learn lessons and
do tasks, but to make the whole world do my bidding
and kneel at my feet. But where is the path free?

(*Constant's voice lifts to exultant joy.*)

CONSTANT.

The path is free to the rim of the sea
Where it touches the rim of the sky.
And beauty stars it with mystery
And magic that never die.

PRUDENCE. Ah, if you know what it is to be free
and rules are nothing to you, why do you serve in
our garden?

CONSTANT. The path ran straight through your
garden.

PRUDENCE. Through our garden? The path?
But the path leads only to our gate.

CONSTANT.

Yes, even a gate cannot stop the path
With magic and beauty starred
For whenever the magic piper plays,
No path in the world is barred.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

And I entered the gate
And now I wait
I wait till the pipe shall play
For I may know when the Pan pipes blow
Where the piper takes his way.
Then I shall go forth from South to North
And travel the years along,
From East to West, for there is no rest
When the piper pipes his song.

(Prudence is leaning forward in rapture and bewilderment.)

PRUDENCE. What do you mean? Oh, where will you go?

CONSTANT. Forth on the path again, the piper's path.

PRUDENCE. Where does it go? To the king's palace?

(Constant shrugs his shoulders.)

CONSTANT. Who knows?

(Prudence is too sure of her version of this wonderful tale to be shaken.)

PRUDENCE. Oh,—I knew it did—to the king's palace where one always finds one's heart's desires.

CONSTANT.

Yes, heart's desire. When you hear the pipe
You hold Olympus in your hands and drink
The nectar of the gods. There is no joy
Which does not wing its way into your heart
While you are listening to that melody.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. My heart's desire! My heart's desire! The love of a king! (*She turns to Constant, who stands at the end of the garden seat.*) Ah, where shall I find the path that leads to my heart's desire? Where does it go? Have you come to show me?

CONSTANT.

Nay, for I know not where the path may lead
Only I follow, follow where the pipe
Calls to my heart,—now from the wilderness
Now through the long still aisles of forest trees,
Now from the mountain pinnacles of dawn,
Today within your garden. Follow me
And you may also hear.

(*Prudence has drawn back a little, and doubt and dread have come into her eyes.*)

PRUDENCE. But where will you take me? What should I do in the wilderness and on the tops of mountains? Must we go that way?

CONSTANT.

Wherever the pipe leads. I serve the pipe.

(*Prudence hears a word more ominous than "wilderness" or "mountain top."*)

PRUDENCE. You serve! But are you not a king?

(*Constant is the one to start back in surprise now.*)

CONSTANT.

A king! Dusk of Olympus, no!

PRUDENCE. But you speak like a king.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

CONSTANT.

The music of the pipe clings to my heart
And so I speak some echo of its sound.

PRUDENCE. And you said you need not obey any rules.

CONSTANT.

I laugh and leave all mortal rules behind,
But I am bound to beauty and the pipe!

(Prudence rises, still clinging to the treasured proofs of his kingship. She looks at him with intense longing.)

PRUDENCE. But why, if you are not a king, did you disguise yourself with a magic cap?

CONSTANT.

This is no magic cap. I found it once
Hanging upon a gate. It shelters me
From scornful mortal eyes. For those who seek
The pipe are marked in such a wondrous wise
That mortals fear or scorn them. So I wear
A cap up my head.

(Prudence retreats from him slowly, loath to abandon her beloved tale of the king in disguise.)

PRUDENCE. Then the gardener's cap does not cover a crown, the badge of your race?

CONSTANT.

Badge of my race? A crown? Nay, not a crown!

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE.

Then—you—are not—a king?

CONSTANT.

Nay.

(She sinks upon the seat again, overcome by disappointment and weeps. Constant, distressed beyond all bearing, drops to his knees at her side and takes her hand.)

Nay, do not weep! The world is full of kings!

(She lifts her head sadly.)

PRUDENCE. Perhaps, but they will never come to our garden. (She appeals to him impulsively again.) Oh, I thought you had come to make me a queen, to give me my heart's desire.

CONSTANT (*rising*).

Nay, neither I, nor any king on earth

Can bring your heart's desire. But when you hear

The piper of the world, it will be won.

Ah, would he pipe, you should know ecstasy

Far above queenly crowns and gifts of kings!

(He steps away from her as though he appealed to a hidden power. Prudence follows him with wistful eyes.)

PRUDENCE. I cannot understand. How shall I hear the pipe?

(At that very moment a long sweet trill shivers the silence of the garden and breaks into a ripple of scattering notes. Constant fairly leaps from his feet and Prudence looks

THE GARDENER'S CAP

round her with a kind of wild fear and delight in her face.)

Oh, what is it?

CONSTANT (*his voice thrilling with joyful pride*).
'Tis Pan, my master, piper of the world!

(*Prudence looks around for him incredulously.*)

PRUDENCE. But is he here?

CONSTANT.

Yes, he is everywhere!

He pipes wherever beauty overflows
And fills the earth with joy. But one must serve
And follow beauty with a hungry heart
To hear that strain—Yet many go their ways
And never hear at all—and some may hear
Once on some mountain top of ecstasy
And never hear again. But Pan's own race
Follow his piping through a thousand years
From sea to sea! And of that race am I!

(*He is erect and proud in the center of the path. The pipe rises as though the master hailed his follower with a flood of music. Constant turns.*)

Listen! Does not all joy on earth sing there!
Yet followers of the pipe are few today:
Few wait to hear that strain: few dare the path
That leads from wilderness to mountain peak,
But those who follow where the piper leads
Dance in a mist of laughter and of stars.

(*He stands swaying behind her, poised on tiptoes that seem already dancing. Prudence*

THE GARDENER'S CAP

sits with head lifted and eyes bright with joy.)

PRUDENCE. I never knew music could be so sweet. My heart is aching with it. Surely my heart's desire must be coming to me at last.

CONSTANT.

Ah, never doubt! Your heart's desire comes!
(Constant whirls and dances through the bushes after the flickering strains of the pipe which sound now here, now there, and then die imperceptibly away. Prudence sits listening to the elusive song, so intent on following it that she does not know that Constant has disappeared nor see Peter enter the garden and come up the path toward her. He sees Prudence at once, her face bright with joy. He comes and stands before her but she hardly greets him.)

PETER (*his voice husky with a new emotion and a new hope*). You sent for me, my dear?

(Prudence sees him now, but her eyes merely widen with surprise. She whispers as though she feared to break a spell.)

PRUDENCE. Sent for you? Peter, I had forgotten. Did I send for you?

PETER. Surely I understood your message? "There was something you urgently desired to say to me—with all your heart"? *(He seats himself beside her and takes her hands with impetuous*

THE GARDENER'S CAP

eagerness that Peter Makepiece has never shown in all his life.) Ah, I knew at once it must be that you loved me! And I see in your face that it is true! There is something in your eyes! They have never been so beautiful.

(She looks at him slowly as though he too were a part of the magic spell that is binding her.)

PRUDENCE. Peter, what has happened? You never spoke to me so before?

PETER. Ah, you have never looked at me with such loveliness in your face. I thought you were fair, but when I see you now it seems as if the beauty I knew was only a disguise.

PRUDENCE. You seem to be someone I never knew before!

(As they look at each other with the joy of this new discovery, the music seems to come nearer, and Constant appears again, only his head visible above the screen of green behind the bench. Peter and Prudence do not see him. He watches with finger on lips. Peter draws something from his waistcoat pocket, a chain of golden topaz that catches the sun. He holds it out to Prudence.)

PETER. I brought you a gift this morning and dared not give it to you when you rejected my suit. But now—will you receive it? It is a necklace given to my grandmother by a queen.

(Prudence takes it tenderly in her hands and her eyes brighten.)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. A queen's necklace. Oh, Peter! For me to wear? (*She puts it on and Peter, watching her, glows anew with admiration.*)

PETER. No queen could look more beautiful wearing it than you do, my beloved. Ah, what name can I call you by—what name is beautiful enough to give you? (*He takes her hands and bows his head over them. Prudence's eyes rest on his bent head with love, and a little glimmer of her old mischief comes into them.*)

PRUDENCE.

All those who love me call me Guenivere!
(*Peter looks up.*)

PETER. Guenivere?

PRUDENCE. Yes, Peter, do you not know that she was the most beautiful queen that ever lived in Britain?

PETER. Ah, that is what I shall call you, then. For she was never more beautiful than you are this moment. Guenivere! Ah, Guenivere? Guenivere? I love you! Do you love me?

(*Prudence looks into his eyes wonderingly. There is silence. Even the pipe seems to rest while she looks at this strangely changed lover of hers.*)

PRUDENCE. Do I love you, Peter? How can I tell? I seem to remember that you wearied me once with talk of ancestry and mansions. But when you

THE GARDENER'S CAP

call me Guenivere, I feel my whole heart leap to you! Peter, is that love? (*She pauses shyly. Then with a new burst of joy the pipe sounds forth again. Prudence's face is no longer wistful and doubting, but bright with ecstasy.*) Listen—the pipe. How loud and sweet it has become! Peter, do you hear?

(*Peter seems to hear for the first time. He looks wonderingly at Prudence.*)

PETER. Guenivere, what is this?

PRUDENCE. It is the pipe, Peter!

PETER. Music! Yes, I thought I heard music as I came into the garden, but I saw no one, and I thought it must be only the beating of my heart. There was a ringing in my ears but I thought it was for joy that you had sent for me—hope that you might love me. Ah, Guenivere! Guenivere! Do not take away that joy and that hope. Tell me that you do love me, indeed!

PRUDENCE. Yes, Peter, for I know at last. I do love you indeed!

PETER. Guenivere! My queen! (*With this cry of joy he takes her in his arms. Her face is full of content. Constant peeps over the hedge, his face radiant.*)

CONSTANT. The king has come at last! And heart's desire!

(*Peter and Prudence start away from each other. Peter looks around.*)

PETER. Surely I heard—Who spoke just then?

(*Constant leaps from behind the hedge. He has discarded the smock and over his original garments of tattered green and brown, hang garlands of leaves. He is a swaying creature of the woodlands. And as he speaks, he sweeps from his head the gardener's cap and shows the curly head and upspringing horns of a faun.*)

CONSTANT. A follower of Pan!

(*Peter springs up too, regarding this unheard-of-creature in utter astonishment. Prudence sits spell-bound and a little frightened at this unexpected climax to her romance.*)

PETER. By the sword of St. George!

PRUDENCE (*breathlessly*). Who are you? What—what are those on your head?

CONSTANT (*with gay pride*). The badge of my race! (*He comes forward with hands outflung to her. She shrinks away.*)

PRUDENCE. Oh! Do not come so near! I am almost afraid! Of what race are you?

CONSTANT.

I am a faun—a follower of Pan
A wanderer on the wind, a heart of laughter.
I have danced in Arcady: I shall dance hereafter

In haunts of beauty yet undreamed of man.

THE GARDENER'S CAP

Today I serve as beauty's gardener boy
And aeons hence, if so the pipe shall call me,
I still shall follow on the path of joy
Whatever fate or fortune shall befall me!
You who have heard the piper, follow me
If you would wander where the path is free
And know the magic spell that can enthral me.

(*He stands swaying on tiptoe. Prudence is half captured, half afraid.*)

PRUDENCE. But who are you? Where would you lead me? I long to follow and yet—Oh, where are you going?

CONSTANT.

I follow the pipe forever! Come!

(*As he holds out his hand, she rises and sways toward him. Peter realizes with horror that she is under some strange spell. He catches her to him roughly.*)

PETER. Prudence!

(*Prudence looks at him vaguely.*)

PRUDENCE. Was it you that called "Prudence," Peter?

(*Suddenly Madam Hearthworthy appears. She too calls out "Prudence" and then, receiving no answer, stands looking about anxiously.*)

I hear someone else calling me Prudence! (*She turns back to Constant with hand outstretched.*)

CONSTANT. Guenivere! Come!

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. Yes, yes, but Mother is coming! She will never let me go if she sees me. Hide in the bushes and wait for me until Mother has gone.

(Constant starts dancing backward into the bushes.)

Oh, strange horned boy, wait for me. I will go!

(As Constant disappears, Peter turns Prudence roughly toward him, and looks into her face.)

PETER. Prudence, where are you going?

(She looks into his face and a spell seems to leave her. The piping is silent now.)

PRUDENCE. Why, Peter, I don't know. *(Then her eyes grow wistful again.)* But where is the piper? There is no sound. Shall we never hear the piping again?

PETER *(in bewilderment)*. Did we ever hear it?

PRUDENCE. Surely we were not dreaming. It was here in our garden, the loveliest music I have ever heard! It told me that I loved you, Peter. It told me that the world was full of wonderful things that the romances do not even guess. Oh, shall I never hear such music again?

PETER *(with happy resourcefulness)*. When we are married, my dear, we must often go to concerts together.

(She accepts this substitute with a smile, but her eyes are a little wistful.)

THE GARDENER'S CAP

PRUDENCE. That will be lovely, Peter. But—

(He silences her with a kiss, just as Madam comes down the path. She catches sight of the lovers, and placid triumph wipes all care from her face. But at the sound of her foot on the gravel, they spring apart. Madam hastens to assume the unconscious air of one on an absorbing errand.)

MADAM. Oh, do not let me disturb you. I am merely looking for Constant. It is past the hour when I told him to present himself. When engagements are not punctually kept, my day is so disordered. Where can he be!

PETER. I had quite forgotten the rogue. Where is he, indeed?

PRUDENCE. I—I think he has gone already, Mother!

MADAM. Constant! Gone already! But where?

PRUDENCE (*dreamily*). Oh, I wish I knew!

(Peter and Madam Hearthworthy look at her in alarm.)

PETER. My dear one!

(She turns to him with a vague smile.)

PRUDENCE. I mean—Oh, I feel as if I had been dreaming!

MADAM. Prudence! What is the matter? You look quite strange. Has anything happened?

THE GARDENER'S CAP

(*In the moment of silence Peter steps to Prudence's side and puts his arm about her.*)

PETER. Madam Hearthworthy, something very delightful has happened. Your daughter has consented to become my wife.

(*Madam affects surprise, but her pleasure is perfectly sincere.*)

MADAM. Prudence! Squire Makepiece! You little know what this means to me! Squire, you must stay and dine with us.

PETER. Do you bid me, Guenivere?

PRUDENCE. Yes, Peter. (*She holds out her hand and he takes it and draws it tenderly through his arm. They go toward the house. Madam Hearthworthy is about to follow, but she is stopped by Pocket, who leaps out of the bushes, his eyes bulging beyond all precedent, and a gardener's smock hanging from one outstretched hand, a cap from the other.*)

POCKET. Oh, Madam!

MADAM. What is the matter, Pocket? You look quite disordered. And what have you there?

POCKET. Look what I found right behind the garden seat, Madam! Constant's shirt and cap! Lying on the grass!

MADAM. The gardener's garments! Strewn on the grass! Indecent! Indelicate! What can it mean?

THE GARDENER'S CAP

POCKET. It's my opinion he's gone, ma'am!

MADAM. Yes, so it appears. Well, we shall be more comfortable without him. I should have discharged him in any case.

POCKET. Yes, ma'am.

(*Madam turns toward the house again, but she has one more discovery to make. The flower by the garden seat for the first time meets her eye.*)

MADAM. Pocket, what is that I see in the grass near the garden seat?

POCKET. A flower, ma'am.

(*Madam tosses her head indignantly.*)

MADAM. A very undesirable location for a flower! Quite outside the flower beds! Most unsightly! Pull it up, Pocket, and throw it on the rubbish heap.

POCKET. Yes, ma'am. (*He uproots the flower with the wandering soul and bears it away with the garments of the unruly waif who had set it there. Madam sighs.*)

MADAM. In one day of neglect a garden can become disorderly. I must attend at once to engaging a suitable gardener. Ah, me! The time is still inconvenient for dying. (*Bravely shouldering this new responsibility, Madam Hearthworthy goes up the path and enters the house. No sooner has she gone than the piping rises again, more full and sweet*

THE GARDENER'S CAP

than ever. Then from the shrubbery on all sides troop dancing nymphs and fauns, Constant only one of a group of glad and graceful figures who weave a spell of movement through the garden. They dance until the pipe seems to be receding into the distance and then form a procession as if to follow it. Constant pauses at the steps of the house and calls.)

CONSTANT. Guenivere!

(*The door opens and she comes forth. At sight of the nymphs and fauns she cries out in delight.*)

PRUDENCE. Oh!

CONSTANT. The piper calls! Come, follow where he leads! (*He moves after the dancers, holding out his hand to Prudence. She takes one wavering step toward him.*)

PRUDENCE. Yes, yes! Take my hand! (*Then she turns back.*) But Peter—I cannot go without Peter. And Mother would worry. Oh, I cannot go for long. When shall I return?

CONSTANT.

The followers of the pipe do not return
Their path lies on forever where new dawns
And higher pinnacles and farther stars
Call to them ever through the master's pipe.
It calls, I follow—follow where it leads!

(*He dances after the others. They swirl once more madly round the garden as Prude-*

THE GARDENER'S CAP

dence watches, spellbound. Peter comes out of the house, calling to her.)

PETER. Prudence! Nay, I mean Guenivere!
(She puts a hand upon his lips.)

PRUDENCE. Hush, Peter. And see!

(He looks wide-eyed upon the vision until, led by the pipe which calls ever more faint and far, the fauns dance away. Constant, last of all, holds out a hand to Prudence. She waves to him in answer and her eyes are wistful, but Peter holds her with a firm arm. As the faun dances away through the trees, Peter bends to kiss Prudence upon the lips, and together they go into the house.)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

CHARACTERS

DAVID HOYT

HOPE HOYT

DELIGHT MORE

SAMUEL

BENJAMIN

PETER, a Dutch trader

MERCY DELAFIELD

GOVERNOR LINDSEY

PARSON GOODHUE

MRS. HOYT

MRS. MORE

GRATEFUL

PRUDENCE

Puritan Children

Other men and women of the Puritan colony

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

A hilltop field on the outskirts of a Puritan town has been cleared of trees and planted with corn. The fringe of maples, just turning crimson, which border the little clearing, and one clump of tall, dark cedars, standing almost like temple pillars at the left, give the place a rare beauty. But as a corn field, it seems to have been unsuccessful. Some thin withered cornstalks are stacked and some strewn on the ground. In the gathering twilight, the stacks look like disreputable ghosts tottering about, their ragged leaves stirred by wandering winds.

Even at this twilight hour, a Puritan lad still works in the field, stacking the poor corn which is his only harvest. He ties the last stack and then stands wearily looking over his field. He speaks bitterly to himself.

DAVID. My harvest! Fit only for burning! (*He looks up as though in prayer and then falls to his knees beside the last stack. But he does not pray.*) Shall I deafen God with my failures? This field belongs to me—not to God—nor—(*He seems to hesitate before a name too hateful for him to speak.*) nor to God's foe! (*With a groan he stretches himself on the ground and hides his face in his arms.*) As he lies there, twilight deepens and mysterious be-

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

ings like spirits of the trees steal to the edge of the clearing and stand swaying within the shadow of the woods. A hum of insect music fills the air and bats sweep across the field, brushing the cornstacks with their wings. Then from the cedars steps a tall dim figure. The great feather above his head and the fringed garments of skin show that he is an Indian chief. The colors of his garments are gray and green, scarcely distinguishable from the shadows. He raises his hand as though in greeting and the spirits of the wood steal closer, stretching out their arms to him. With a wide gesture he seems to gather to himself all the beauty of the night. Then, with arms outstretched as though to draw the world with him, he steps back into the shadow of the cedars and disappears. The woodland spirits retreat into the darkness: the bats flit away. David lies alone, his face still buried in his arms. He has not stirred. Then up the hill come two little girls dressed in Puritan gowns and caps. The older, who is about twelve, walks a little ahead, with an air of resolute courage. The younger child clings to her hand and drags back as though in fear. In the center of the field, Hope Hoyt pauses and drops the little girl's hand. Neither of them sees David. Delight steps closer to Hope and whispers in her fear.)

DELIGHT. Is this the Devil's Field, Hope?

(David sits up suddenly as if a taunting spirit had called him. He speaks into the air as though to spirits.)

DAVID. Who said the Devil's Field? The field is mine!

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

(At his voice the little girls scream with fright, and David sees them. He is on his feet in an instant and hurrying toward them.)

Why, it is Delight More—and you, Hope! Did I fright you, sister? (He soothes the terrified children who cling to him, still trembling.)

HOPE. David!

DELIGHT. Oh, we were afraid!

DAVID. Hope, you should not have come so far from town and twilight falling.

HOPE. Delight wanted to come, but she did not know the way, so I brought her.

DAVID. It was wrong, Hope. You might both have been—lost in the woods. (He does not dare to speak of other fears that come into his mind.)

HOPE. I remembered the way, for I came with you in the spring when you were felling the trees. You brought me, yourself, David.

DAVID. That was before I learned there were dangers here.

(Delight is terrified once more.)

DELIGHT. Oh, David! What dangers?

(David does not answer but continues to speak gravely to Hope.)

DAVID. Since then, my sister, I have forbidden your coming. You know that.

(Delight is fearfully insistent.)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

DELIGHT. What dangers, David? Did you forbid her because of the Devil?

(*Hope turns to Delight to warn her that this is dangerous questioning.*)

HOPE. Sh! Delight! He will not hear of the Devil!

(*But David has heard and he turns away in bitter anger.*)

DAVID. The Devil! The Devil! They have taught even their babes to prate of their foolish myths.

HOPE. You have made him very angry, Delight. David does not hold with those who say that the Devil is in this field.

DELIGHT. But surely it was the Devil who made the corn turn brown, for David sowed good seed here such as the other men of the colony sowed. Yet David's corn only bore no ears—and see how brown and withered the leaves are, as if fiery hoofs had tramped on them. Surely this is the Devil's work. You can see for yourself, Hope. (*She lifts the tattered leaves with her finger tips. David stands apart listening to the child's chatter, his head bowed. Hope watches him anxiously.*)

HOPE. Delight, you talk overmuch. (*She goes to David and takes his hand gently.*)

(*He wheels on her.*)

DAVID. Why must you bring her here tonight, Hope?

HOPE. She does not know what she is saying! David, are you sad at heart? Why have you not gone home? We supped an hour ago.

DAVID (*grimly*). I stayed to bind up my sheaves!

HOPE. But when we came, you were not binding sheaves. You were sitting on the ground.

DAVID (*with a bitter laugh*). It is quite safe for me to sit on the ground now—yea, with never even a gun at my side. Now that my harvest has failed, I shall not be molested,—however I may sit unguarded in my field at twilight. A few months gone—and there would have been an arrow in my back.

HOPE. A few months gone? When you were fell-ing the trees, David?

DAVID. Yes.

DELIGHT. Then there were arrows?

DAVID. Yes.

DELIGHT (*with the air of one whose theories are fully proved*). And was it not the Devil who shot those arrows?

DAVID (*in a voice of thunder*). No!

DELIGHT. Who, then?

DAVID (*shrugs his shoulders*). I have heard that arrows are shot by Indians.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

DELIGHT. But have you ever seen an Indian here on this hill, David?

DAVID. No.

DELIGHT (*triumphant*). There!

(*Hope springs to her brother's defense.*)

HOPE. But one day, he saw a red hand stealing out of the bushes to grasp his gun—you told me that, yourself, David—And you sprang with your axe to cut off the hand, but it vanished. And then you picked up your gun and fired it into the bushes. But there was no sound of anyone who cried out because he was wounded nor of anyone running away. And when you looked into the bushes there was no one there. Is that not true, David?

DAVID (*reluctantly*). Yes, it is true.

(*Delight feels that she has been still further vindicated.*)

DELIGHT. Then if no one was there, it could not have been an Indian at all, but the father of all Indians, the Devil, himself,—and it is the Devil who owns this field!

DAVID. Who told you that?

DELIGHT. My mother. So it must be true.

DAVID. Go to your mother again and tell her that it is I, David Hoyt, who owns this field. It fell to my share when the men were drawing lots for

their holdings, and from that day the field has been mine.

DELIGHT. Mother says there must have been a curse on you when you drew this field. She says it is a strange thing, too, that you should be so cursed, for your mother is of Godly folk and she can only believe that you are unregenerate.

(*David's anger turns to mirth at this grotesque echo of Mrs. More's myth-making. He laughs.*)

DAVID. Why, one must laugh at this child! I had forgotten that one must laugh sometimes. Unregenerate! I can hear your mother saying it.

(*Delight hurries on.*)

DELIGHT. She says, too, that when you began to cut the trees to make a clearing, the Devil shot arrows at you, and you asked the Governor for another holding.

HOPE (*again springing to David's defense*). But it was not because David was afraid of the arrows! David is the bravest boy in the colony!

DAVID. Delight, did your mother say I was afraid?

DELIGHT (*speaks eagerly, for David's look is dark again*). Oh, no! No!

(*David laughs once more.*)

DAVID. That was exceeding generous of your mother!

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

(*Unfortunately his laughter encourages Delight to go on.*)

DELIGHT. She says you wanted to stop cutting the trees because Mercy Delafield asked you to spare them. (*There is silence for a moment.*) And mother said it—so it must be true.

DAVID. Yes, it is true.

DELIGHT. But when I ask Mercy about it—she puts me off—and laughs at me for asking questions. Why did Mercy want you to stop cutting the trees, David?

(*David speaks dreamily, to himself rather than to the children.*)

DAVID. It was because she loved the hilltop best, I think, when the trees were growing. She and I often came here together that first autumn when the leaves were so red and gold. The first tree that we ever saw turn crimson was a maple on this hill. She stopped at my door early one morning when the air was cold, and cried out to me, "David, look at the hill! It has flung out a crimson banner for us. Let us go up and see!" That tree stood there—in the center of the field.

HOPE. Oh, David, you have cut it down!

DAVID. There were so many that she loved—I could not spare them all. (*He goes thoughtfully on among the memories that throng the hill for him.*) One day when winter had come and you could see the

shoulder of the hill through the trees—we came upon the mound behind the cedars. (*He walks toward the group of cedars: the little girls watch him fearfully, not daring to follow him nearer. Delight shudders.*)

DELIGHT. The sachem's grave!

DAVID. Yes, that is what Mercy called it. She said a great chieftain must be buried there and that the cedars had been planted to guard his grave and that the woods were trying to hide it from the white man. The cedar trees most of all were sacred to her, so whatever other trees I must fell, I spared her cedars.

DELIGHT. Mother says you should have felled them instead of listening to Mercy with her pagan talk.

(*David comes out of his dream with a quick, impatient movement. He takes a step toward Delight, but Hope is before him.*)

HOPE (*stoutly*). How could he help listening to Mercy? We listen to her, Delight, and she tells us about the wonderful dreams that come to her when she is all alone up here on the hill.

DAVID. Mercy here! On the hill?

(*Hope does not notice the cloud that darkens her brother's face. She goes on cheerfully.*)

HOPE. Yes, she often comes here in the twilight. She says this is the place where she is most happy—

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

and that when she sits here and watches the stars come out over the valley, the fairies put stories in her head.

DELIGHT. There are no fairies, mother says.

HOPE. Yes, mother tells me that too, and will not let me talk about them—and yet mother tells me often about the angels and they are only the fairies grown old and wise. Are they not, David? (*She turns and finds him abstracted and frowning. She runs to him and shakes his arm.*) David, you are not listening!

DAVID. I have forbidden her to come here!

(*His angry tone brings Hope to a consciousness of what she has done. The little girls look at each other in alarm. Hope goes to Delight.*)

HOPE. Oh, Delight, Mercy said we were not to tell him! She said—

DAVID. She tries to deceive me!

HOPE. Oh, he will chide her now. (*She runs back to him, eager to make amends.*) David,—it was only—Mercy said she could not choose but come—for there were those here who called her—and beautiful dreams were waiting here—and that you would be sad if you knew—so—oh, David, you do not listen!

DAVID (*grimly*). She was deceiving me.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

HOPE. But, David—(*She is stopped by a rustling in the bushes. All three look up apprehensively and stand listening.*) Oh, Delight! Listen!

DELIGHT. The bushes rustled! O-oh, is it the Devil?

(*Hope goes to her quickly.*)

HOPE. Of course it is not the Devil! It is Mercy coming at last—and now David will chide her—Oh, dear!

DELIGHT (*clinging to Hope*). Oh, Hope, if it should not be Mercy but—the Devil!

(*In the gray twilight, this seems only too possible, even to Hope. They cling together fearfully. David still stands apart with strained unhappy face turned toward the stirring brush at the edge of the clearing. There is a tense moment. But the figures that emerge from the shadows are two little Puritan boys. The tension is relieved. David laughs.*)

HOPE. Oh, see, Delight! It is only Benjamin and Samuel!

DAVID. Is all the colony coming to my field to see my goodly harvest? (*He sweeps the field with a mocking gesture. Benjamin and Samuel are perhaps a little abashed to find David. Their greeting is very formal.*)

BENJAMIN and SAMUEL. Good even, David.

(*Delight has taken several moments to recover her poise.*)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

DELIGHT. Of course, it is only Benjamin and Samuel!

HOPE (*slyly*). Delight thought you were the Devil!

DELIGHT. Well, Hope thought you were Mercy.
(The little boys look quickly around them at mention of Mercy.)

BENJAMIN. Isn't Mercy here? We want her—

DELIGHT. We came to find her, too.

SAMUEL. Where can she be? She has been gone all day.

HOPE. We went to her house and knocked at her window, but she was not there—

SAMUEL. No,—did you not hear? After the Dutch peddler came with the deer skins and the bag of treasure—

BENJAMIN. The one Governor Lindsey drove out of town for selling vanities. The Governor, himself, took a whip and—

(Samuel steps forward to prevent Benjamin from grasping the thread of the narrative.)

SAMUEL. Let me tell it, Bennie! Well, before the peddler was driven away, he sold Mercy Delafield a piece of red cloth!

(David makes a movement of impatience and concern. The little girls are enchanted at very mention of such beauty.)

DELIGHT. Red cloth!

HOPE. Oh, was it bright red?

SAMUEL. Of course it was—as red as blood—and before her mother could take it away from her, Mercy ran into her room and barred the door.

BENJAMIN. And her mother called out to Deacon Osgood who was passing, and Mr. Hopkins heard—and they all—

(David has been following the tale with gathering concern, but he interrupts now for the first time. His voice is husky with excitement.)

DAVID. None laid hands on her? The door was barred?

BENJAMIN. But they broke open the door!

SAMUEL. Rather than connive at such sinful proceedings. *(His voice is a ludicrous echo of Deacon Osgood's, but the little group are too excited to laugh at him.)* And when they got into the room—

DAVID. Yes?

(Benjamin adroitly grasps the climax of the story.)

BENJAMIN. She wasn't there!

(There is amazed silence. David seems relieved, but Delight cries out in new terror.)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

DELIGHT. Mercy gone! Oh, is she dead, Hope?

SAMUEL. Nonsense! If she had been dead, they would have found her there. She had run away—
(Benjamin breaks into the tale again.)

BENJAMIN. Out of the window!

SAMUEL. But no one saw her go, though there were many of the neighbors in the front dooryard watching,—Grateful Hopkins and Prudence Sawyer and Josiah—

DAVID. Pious gossips, all of them—in search of scandal—Cowards to frighten her out of her senses!

DELIGHT (*who is envious at the missing of this great adventure*). I wish I had been there to see, only mother kept me indoors because I followed the peddler down the street to see what was in his bag.

DAVID. A worse sin, it seems, than prying open the door of a maid's chamber! *(He turns away from them, bitter and troubled. Delight goes on without heeding his interruptions and dilates on the penance she has suffered.)*

DELIGHT. There was only bread and water for supper, too!

HOPE. Yes, and when I went by Delight's window just now, I heard her crying.

(The boys look as though they would jeer, but Delight is quick to defend herself.)

DELIGHT. Well, you would cry too with only bread and water for supper!

HOPE. So I went in while her mother was out milking, and we went to find Mercy; Mercy can always comfort her. And Delight kept saying she wanted Mercy Delafield!

DELIGHT. So we went straight to Mercy's house—

HOPE. And no one was there. Not even Mercy's mother! So we came here. I thought Mercy would be here surely.

SAMUEL. We thought she would be here, alone, too, for no one else likes to follow her here for dread of the Devil.

(*Their chatter reaches David with new trouble for him. He lifts his head sharply.*)

DAVID. Does all the village know she comes here?

SAMUEL. They say that after you go home at twilight—

DAVID. They say! It is common gossip, then! And I forbade her! She was deceiving me!

HOPE. Do not be so angry, David. One would think you did not love Mercy any more.

(*David turns away from her.*)

DAVID. Can one love deceit?

(*Samuel presses after David to finish his tidings.*)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

SAMUEL. They say—that at twilight she flies here on a broomstick to hear secrets from the Devil. And if they catch her this time—they say—

BENJAMIN. And Samuel and I didn't want Mercy to be caught, so we came first while the others were hunting for her in the houses.

(*The need for action has finally seized David and driven him out of his brooding distress. He turns on Samuel.*)

DAVID. Are they hunting her now?

SAMUEL. Everywhere! With lanterns! When her mother and the neighbors had hunted until sunset, they told the Governor himself. They are searching all the town!

DAVID (*to himself*). It can't be true! Honest men hunting a child with black lies in their hearts.

HOPE. What did you say, David?

DAVID. And if they find her—(*He is full of terror for her now. He strides across the clearing toward the path to the town. Hope follows anxiously.*)

HOPE. Where are you going, David?

DAVID. To find Mercy!

(*Hope sees the wildness in his eyes and clings fearfully to his hand.*)

HOPE. You will not scold her, David, will you?
(He shakes off his sister with a groan and plunges into the bushes. The children look after him a moment and then turn to one another in perplexity.)

DELIGHT. How angry he seems!

BENJAMIN. Mercy said he would be angry if he knew she came here.

DELIGHT. I almost hope he does not find her.

SAMUEL. Where can she be?

HOPE. I wish she would come now—and bring the beautiful red cloth with her.

(At this surprising and untimely display of feminine curiosity the rest are a little shocked. Delight has the gesture and phrase of a rebuke ready.)

DELIGHT. Oh, what sinful vanity, Hope!

(Hope flashes on the little hypocrite hotly.)

HOPE. But you ran down the street after the peddler!

(At this moment a bulky figure emerges from the bushes, a man with a pack on his back. He has flaxen hair and a droll, merry face, but he looks rather weary and bedraggled. The children do not see him till he speaks, but when they hear his voice, they start with terror and back away from him. He comes

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

toward Delight with mocking finger out-stretched.)

PETER. Oh, you ran after the peddler, 'did you?

CHILDREN. Mercy! Is it the Devil? Oh, Hope!
(Samuel is first to recover his senses. He comes forward bravely.)

SAMUEL. It is the peddler himself!

(Peter laughs and speaks with a quaint Dutch accent which causes the children to exchange amused glances.)

PETER. Och, yes! It is the peddler once again!

BENJAMIN. But you were chased away!

PETER. It was not wise to come back? No? I thought when I ran away before all those dogs and the old man with the whip, "It is not wise to pass this way often. These people will make poor trade for me!" But in my haste I ran out of town the wrong way, and there were only forests and who knows what bad Indians in my path!

(The children cluster around him, enchanted by the discovery of such an amusing person.)

BENJAMIN. Oh, you are droll!

PETER. Droll? I am droll, am I? I was almost too droll to be yet a healthy man when I was stumbling through the forests falling flat over logs and thinking each time how it was a savage that had hit me from behind with his hatchet! "Peter," said

I to myself, "if you go on, you will end by being fried at some devil's stake. If you turn back toward New Amsterdam, you must go once again through that town of madmen and dogs. Which do you prefer, Peter?" And Peter—that is I—laid a finger by his nose and said, "Let us go softly by the town, for those the Indians will smell out our footsteps, the madmen are stupid, and if we go by on our toes they will never know."

(*Benjamin feels that some slight has been put upon the town. He bristles in its defense.*)

BENJAMIN. Governor Lindsey is not stupid. He is the wisest man in the colony.

(*Peter accepts this information with raised eyebrows and a droll smile.*)

PETER. I will not go too near his wisdom, or his whip, I promise. But tonight I cannot go farther from him than this hill. (*He sits heavily on a felled log.*) I have had much business today though little trade—and I am weary. My pack is heavy with the goods that the townsfolk did not buy, and my stomach is crying for the viands they did not offer me. I shall eat and sleep here for all the Governor may say.

(*Hope touches his shoulder and bends over him with motherly concern. The others still press around him with friendly delight.*)

HOPE. Have you anything to eat, Peter?

(*Peter looks up into her face with surprise and pleasure.*)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

PETER. Oh, you are a woman, I could love for that question, and for remembering that my name is Peter.

(*Hope draws away sedately.*)

HOPE. You speak foolishly. I am not a woman, and one can love only God, not carnal beings, and you said only a moment ago that your name was Peter.

(*Peter shrugs his shoulders and laughs at this Puritan rebuke to his superficial gallantry.*)

PETER. Och! How I make mistakes! But yes, I have something to eat,—hard Dutch cakes with caraway seeds that one can find sweetness in for a long time. (*He opens his pack and draws forth a gayly painted tin box. The children press closer, eager to see whatever comes from this miraculous pack.*)

DELIGHT. What a pretty box! It has pictures of flowers on it and little boys with wings.

(*Peter hands it to her gallantly after he has removed the cakes. She accepts it with delight, but she cannot restrain a wistful glance at the contents. Peter is quick to notice this.*)

PETER. A present for you! You shall have the box and I shall have the cakes. You, I think, are not starving?

DELIGHT (*plaintively*). I have had only bread and water all day.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

PETER. What? Potverblikken! They have hard fare in that town as well as hard hearts!

(*Benjamin presses forward once more to defend the town.*)

BENJAMIN. She was being punished because she followed you down the hill to see what was in your pack.

PETER. Ach, then! You suffered for my sake! For that, too, were you a woman and not carnal, I could love you! Yes! Well, share my cakes with me then, and look without fear of punishment into my poor pack.

CHILDREN. Oh, may we?

(*He nods, his mouth already full of cookies. The children burrow happily into the bag, each pulling forth mysterious treasures of a captivating and dazzling kind.*)

DELIGHT. Oh, may we open the boxes?

PETER. All of them,—most freely without fear of bread and water.

(*Hope forthwith opens a box and starts back with a cry of pleasure.*)

HOPE. O-oh, in this one is a necklace of blue beads! How sinful—and how beautiful!

DELIGHT. Put them on, Hope. They are like the color of your eyes.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

(Hope puts them on ecstatically, and Delight looks on in admiration.)

Oh, you look lovely!

HOPE. I wish I could see!

(Peter reaches into his pack and pulls out a little hand mirror which he presents to Hope.)

PETER. Och! But you shall see!

HOPE. Oh, it is a little looking glass to hold in my hand! How wonderful!

DELIGHT. There is a big one on top of mother's chest of drawers but it is too high for me to look in, and mother would never lift me up for fear it would make me vain.

PETER. Does she grow vain looking in? *(His sly humor is lost on Delight, who answers earnestly in her mother's own phrases.)*

DELIGHT. Oh, no! She only looks in to see if her hair is smooth, for neatness pleases the Lord. But she makes my hair smooth for me, so I never need a looking glass.

(Hope meanwhile is dreamily absorbed in her own reflection. Perhaps the fears of the Puritan mother are being realized.)

HOPE. My face looks like a flower painted on a little round plate.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

PETER (*appreciatively*). That is well spoken. It is like a flower.

HOPE. How I love this little looking glass!

DELIGHT. Let me look in! (*She takes the mirror, but frowns at once when she sees her drab little image reflected there.*) Oh, I do not look so pretty. I have no beads to wear!

PETER. Will this not make the picture better? See! (*Peter pulls out of the pack a yellow ribbon and, going to Delight, ties it bewitchingly around her white cap. Delight peeps again into the mirror.*)

DELIGHT. Oh, yes! Yes! It is lovely! (*She jumps up and down with joy. The boys meanwhile are comparing knife-blades sagely, unmoved by this display of feminine vanity.*)

BENJAMIN. This knife is as sharp as a sword.

SAMUEL. This one would cut a man's hand off!

BENJAMIN. If that Devil whom David saw in this field came out, I would cut his hand off in a wink!

(*They laugh savagely and go through an imaginary devil hunt while the girls are discovering new finery.*)

DELIGHT. Oh, what is in this box? It is like cobwebs! (*She pulls out a roll of lace and lets it fall in festoons from her hands. Peter picks up one end*

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

of it and proceeds to display it with the tones and gesture of the professional trader advertising his wares.)

PETER. That is lace, my lady, the finest Mechlin lace, brought with the last cargo to New Amsterdam, made in Holland by the lacemaker to the wife of a Burgomaster. It will be—

(*The boys, arrested by the fantastic behavior of Peter, stop their devil hunt and draw nearer.*)

SAMUEL. Why do you speak in that droll voice?

BENJAMIN. That was the voice you used when you told Mercy Delafield about the red cloth.

(*Peter looks up quickly.*)

PETER. Mercy Delafield? That was her name? Yes? (*He looks eagerly from one child to another. His only answer is a somewhat irrelevant but enthusiastic statement from Delight.*)

DELIGHT. I love Mercy Delafield!

PETER. May one love her, then? (*He gives a teasing glance at Hope.*)

DELIGHT. No, mother does not let me say that.

PETER. How very hard not to say it! With her eyes shining and her curls jumping forth under her white cap and her chin tilted up at you, she was like

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

a little question which teased, "Do you not love me?" Who could say no?

(*The children listen with grave surprise.*)

SAMUEL. You talk a great deal—almost as much as the minister on Sundays.

(*Peter laughs at this unique comparison.*)

PETER. But not the same, eh?

SAMUEL. I don't understand either of you very well, but I know you are talking about Mercy Delafield.

PETER. If you understand the minister half so well as that, you must be a good Puritan. Do you, too, love Mercy Delafield?

SAMUEL. Well, she tells us stories and finds butterflies still in their eggs for us, and once she went straight up to the sachem's grave and picked up an arrowhead and gave it to me.

PETER. Ach, then, she is brave as well as beautiful! Where is the sachem's grave?

BENJAMIN. There! (*He points to the cedars so suddenly that Peter starts away in alarm, partly real, partly dramatic.*)

PETER. Oh, Polvolblommen! I did not plan to spend the night in a graveyard!

HOPE. Oh, this is not a graveyard. It was once

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

the woods. My brother David wanted to make a cornfield here, so he cut down the trees and pulled all the roots out of the ground; but he had terrible adventures while he worked, so that the town says that the Devil was cursing him for cutting down the woods around the sachem's grave.

PETER. Och, so! The Devil is on the side of the sachem, then?

(Delight turns to him in surprise at his ignorance and speaks as though to a very stupid child.)

DELIGHT. Has no one ever told you? A sachem is an Indian, and all Indians are the children of the Devil.

(To Peter this Puritan mythology is quite new. He wrinkles up his nose with amused distaste.)

PETER. Did the minister say that?

DELIGHT. It was my mother who told me, but the minister knows it, and all the town.

PETER. I prefer to talk about Mercy Delafield.

(His listeners show that they are not loath to continue this topic.)

HOPE. It was Mercy who told David about the sachem's grave. She said a famous Indian must be buried there and that those cedars had been planted to guard his grave and the woods had grown up to cover it. She begged David to go away and leave

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

the hill, for she said it was enchanted ground. And David went to the Governor and asked that he be given another field to clear. But the Governor is very stern, and he bade David clear the field that fell to his lot. So David went on working. But he did not cut the cedar trees, in spite of the Governor.

PETER. No? And how came he to defy such an one as his wisdom, the Governor?

DELIGHT. My mother says it was because Mercy was there on the day he went to cut the cedars. Perhaps she cried.

HOPE. And he could not make Mercy cry, you see, for he wants to wed her.

(Peter shows real surprise and dismay at this information.)

PETER. Oh, does he? Potvolblommen! Is your brother David very handsome?

HOPE (*happily*). Oh, yes!

PETER. And rich?

HOPE. Alas, no, for the crop in the Devil's Field failed, and of all the men in the colony, David is the only one who has no harvest. He is very poor.

(Peter shows ungenerous satisfaction at this.)

PETER. Och! That is well!

(At this moment Mercy's voice is heard through the trees. She is singing a song of fairies.)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

MERCY's VOICE.

Dewdrops along the cobwebs,
Sunlight across the grass,
Laughter among the tree tops,
Shadows that change and pass—
These must be made of magic,
Woven with fairy spells,
Spun with a charm enchanted,
Dreamed of in fairy dells.

(*The children's faces brighten. Peter too listens with rapturous expression of anticipation.*)

BENJAMIN. Listen!

DELIGHT. It is Mercy's song!

SAMUEL. She is coming at last!

PETER. Och! Does she sing like that!

HOPE (*nods proudly*). She made that song, too
—out of her head!

(*Peter laughs.*)

PETER. I'll warrant it's not in the hymn book!

(*Delight scents some criticism of the song in these words.*)

DELIGHT. I think it is beautiful!

PETER. I think so too! Why does your Mercy come to this lonely hill?

HOPE. She often comes. She loves it here. She says she grows tired of the dark houses and the narrow doorsteps. There when you look out you can only see the street and the row of houses all alike; but when she sits here she can look out and see all the beautiful things God sees from His sky. She calls this hill God's Doorstep.

(*Peter echoes the word with a mixture of reverence and curiosity.*)

PETER. God's Doorstep! Does the minister hear her say that?

HOPE. He never listens. He covers his ears when she talks, for he says she speaks lightly of God.

SAMUEL. But in the town they know she calls the field God's Doorstep—

BENJAMIN. And it makes them angry. They say it is surely not God who dwells here, but the Devil himself,—and they call this the Devil's Field.

DELIGHT. And so they say she must mistake the Devil for God—

BENJAMIN. As people do who are possessed by evil spirits.

SAMUEL. And so some think she must be a witch.

PETER. A witch? That child with shining eyes—a witch?

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

PETER, BENJAMIN, DELIGHT AND HOPE. But it is not true!

(During these eager contributions to Mercy's history, Peter is intent on discovering the field from the point of view of one who calls it God's Doorstep. The trees that hem it in, the sachem's grave, the wide view of the town, all appear to him in a new beauty. So he hardly hears the latter part of the conversation and indeed the thought of Mercy as a witch would not greatly alarm a care-free trader from New Amsterdam. As Mercy enters, Peter steps back into the shadow of the trees, but he need not have feared to be discovered. Mercy walks straight to the center of the field, too exalted to see any mortal within it. She is wearing a red cape and walking like a queen before an adoring populace. Her head is lifted in dreamy exaltation. The children are silent at first with admiration of Mercy's cloak and Peter with appreciation of her beauty. She is dark and slender with shining eyes and a kind of elfin charm that adds to the red cloak an air of positive enchantment. In the center of the field she stops and throws out her arms with a gesture of joy and greeting.)

MERCY. Oh, my world, am I not fine tonight? I have a crimson cloak like the maples!

(The children run forward and clasp her around the waist and by the hands. She looks down with amazement.)

Why, Benjamin and Samuel—and Hope Hoyt and Delight! How come you here at this late hour!

(They burst into a torrent of eager questions so that Mercy can only stand, laughing at the bombardment.)

HOPE. Where have you been, Mercy?

DELIGHT. Oh, Mercy! You have made a red cape.

BENJAMIN. How did you get out of the window?

DELIGHT. Weren't you afraid?

HOPE. Is it not beautiful?

DELIGHT. We have been waiting so long for you!

SAMUEL. Where have you been?

(Mercy, laughing, disentangles herself from their clutches and staggers with a great show of exhaustion to the log where Peter had been sitting. She sinks down, warding them off with her hands.)

MERCY. Oh, one at a time, my dears! I can't even remember so many questions—and how can I answer them? I have been climbing, you know! *(She pretends to pant for breath. Peter's face peeps out with a sly mocking smile, but Mercy does not see him.)*

PETER. Climbing? Yes! And singing all the way!

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

HOPE. That's only an excuse. You shall tell us where you have been. We wanted you.

(*Mercy laughs roguishly.*)

MERCY. Well, so did mother and Deacon Osgood and a score of others who were storming at my very door to take away my beautiful red cloth. They would have burned it if they had been angry enough to be so thriftless; but at least they would have dyed it black,—and I felt my heart rise to defend it—my beautiful red cape!

DELIGHT. But how did it get to be a cape?

MERCY. By aid of scissors and needle and thread which I took with me in my mad flight out of the window.

SAMUEL. Then you did fly out of the window!

MERCY. How else? The neighbors were all assembled in the front dooryard and I had to go by the back lane. Of course they were too stupid to look that way and see me running—

BENJAMIN. Where did you run to?

MERCY. At first I didn't know where I was running to. I only knew I must run—to save my beautiful red cape. And then I found myself in front of the meeting-house door. So in I ran and climbed up the little stairs into the steeple—to the very top where the great bell hangs—and there I sat—
(*Mercy goes off into a gale of laughter. Delight is*

naturally shocked at the adventure and the spirit of levity in which it is told.)

DELIGHT. Oh, Mercy!

MERCY. —There I sat and stitched away at my crimson cloak! (*She is untouched by the awed silence of her Puritan listeners, but Hope feels she must remonstrate, however gently.*)

HOPE. Was it not wicked to sew in the church steeple?

(*Mercy eyes her quizzically.*)

MERCY. I never heard that it was forbidden, did you?

(*The children shake their heads doubtfully, silenced but not quite convinced. Peter, who has followed the whole narrative from the shadow of the trees with keen appreciation, is convulsed by Mercy's Puritan logic. She goes on, happily:*)

I asked the bell to hold its tongue and be quiet about my secret, for I wished no one to see me until the cloak was finished. I was afraid the joy of that lovely red color would make the bells burst into peals of delight. It made me cry out when the peddler pulled it out of the bag. Suppose the bell had felt so, too, and started to ring!

PETER. Ah, but it was a Puritan bell. (*Peter has stepped forth from his hiding place, and they all turn at the sound of his mocking voice. Mercy sees him for the first time and in the twilight she does not*

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

recognize him: her hand flies to her heart in fright. The children watch like spectators at a thrilling play.)

MERCY. Who is there?

(Peter comes close with the most gallant bow.)

PETER. A trader come back to see if his wares give satisfaction!

(Now Mercy recognizes him with a pleasurable mixture of admiration and fear at his bold return to forbidden ground.)

MERCY. How did you dare to come back?

PETER. I cannot pretend it was courage brought me this way yet once more. But I will not pretend that I had forgotten my one patron. The crimson cloth has been used without delay, I see! *(He steps back and turns on her the full light of his admiration. She responds instantly and all her alarm at seeing him and her momentary fear for his safety are lost in sharing with him the joy of the crimson cloak. She flings out her arms and pirouettes so that the cloak billows about her. The children meanwhile have forgotten everything except the delight of this encounter between the two most entertaining people in their Puritan world. They sit wide-eyed in a semi-circle watching the little play.)*

MERCY. Is it not a beautiful cape? Autumn was calling out to me to be joyous like a maple tree, when you came by and put this crimson in my way! *(She*

laughs happily.) That's what the minister would call temptation, but I don't think I was meant to resist.

PETER. The maples have not resisted.

MERCY. Oh, is there a leaf on all the trees on all the hills that has turned so glorious a crimson?

(Peter's gallantry rises to her mood. He comes to her with his grandest bow.)

PETER. Is there a leaf on any tree to whom crimson is so becoming?

(Mercy is inspired by this to a wholly natural curtsey which has in it a coquetry never learned among the Puritans. She looks up at Peter gratefully.)

MERCY. That was prettily spoken! Where have you learned your pretty speeches?

(Peter swaggers a little in the light of her favor and is tempted to try her further.)

PETER. Ach, I have traveled the road this long time and pretty speeches make good trade. Even with Indians a kind word thrown in with a bit of ribbon will bring the best skins.

(This is not a pretty speech and he watches for its effect. Mercy bridles haughtily and steps away from him.)

MERCY. But I am not an Indian; I am a Puritan.

PETER. I can hardly believe you are a Puritan.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

Puritans do not wear red cloaks with such grace. (*He chuckles.*) I should have thought that my wares were not suited to Puritans before I came into this town. But already I have learned much by experience. Yes! Ach, and it was worth coming to sell one piece of crimson cloth! (*His adoring face mollifies her at once. She turns back to him gaily.*)

MERCY. How glad I am that you came!

PETER. Ach, are you glad? (*His voice deepens with pleasure, but his face falls as she goes on quite simply and without malice.*)

MERCY. For otherwise I should never have had my beautiful red cloak.

(*But after one crestfallen moment, Peter shrugs his shoulders and returns to the fray, brushing the dust from his tumbled vanity.*)

PETER. A peddler must be content if his wares are praised. Have you no good word to say of the peddler himself?

(*Mercy smiles at him frankly.*)

MERCY. I think you are very droll. (*Then she hesitates and looks wistfully at Peter.*) And I envy you.

PETER (*in surprise*). You envy me!

MERCY. Yes, because you look so full of joy! Most of the men here work so hard that their faces are gray with care. Yours is round and red.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

PETER. Does a Puritan maid prefer red to gray?
(Mercy is too much in earnest to heed his quizzical interruption.)

MERCY. And I envy you because you walk the roads and meet strange people, and laugh with them and make them happy with your wares.

(Peter is completely won with this version of his existence, which shows him by its naïve simplicity the limitations of her own, and appeals at once to his vanity and his chivalry. These are Peter's two dominant traits and through them she has quite unwittingly won his heart. He comes close to her, his voice hoarse with real eagerness. The children lean forward as he speaks and they and Mercy enter with him a world beyond their Puritan boundaries.)

PETER. Would you like to walk the roads? Yes? Ach, then you have only to come with me! It is good walking the roads, but it is sometimes lonely, and with a maid in a red cloak, I should be always gay! We would take the road past all the little villages where the folk are hospitable to traders. Not like this town! Pfui! They will run out to greet us and hear of the other towns we have passed, and the men will purchase the skins I bought of the Indians and the women will bargain for the trinkets I carry for the squaws. White skins or red skins, they are all of the same blood, yes! And we will have our pockets full of silver to spend at the taverns! Ach, that is good! And then at last we will come to New Amsterdam by the sea! The best

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

of towns! And I will build you a little house where you can sit and watch the ships come in from Holland while we rest for new journeys upon the road. Will you not come?

(At first, Mercy has been carried away as by a sudden magic adventure, but as Peter goes on, the eagerness and intensity in his face and voice show her that this is not gallantry or play. A kind of fascinated dread comes into her face and her voice is almost a whisper.)

MERCY. Are you asking me to run away?

(Peter, for all his earnestness, is amused.)

PETER. It is something like that, yes!

(The little girls start to their feet anxiously. Mercy speaks as if to herself.)

MERCY. Oh, I have wanted to run away!

PETER (*eagerly*). Then you will come?

(She draws back quickly.)

MERCY. Oh! not with you!

(Peter is naturally hurt and reproachful.)

PETER. That was a poor return for my pretty speeches.

MERCY. Forgive me. But I could never go your road with you. I could never live in New Amsterdam. It is only my heart that sometimes wants to run away.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

PETER. But it is your heart I am asking for.

(*As she sees that he still misunderstands, Mercy becomes desperate.*)

MERCY. But I cannot give you my heart! No!
Never!

(*A bitter inspiration comes to Peter.*)

PETER. Because you have already given it to
David.

(*Mercy lifts her head sharply.*)

MERCY. Where have you heard of David?

PETER. Ach, meisje, am I not wise? You have
given your heart to him.

(*She answers him quietly now.*)

MERCY. No, you are wrong. He has never even
asked for it.

(*Peter's own hurt makes him momentarily
savage to Mercy.*)

PETER. Do you wait for the asking, then? Truly
Puritan maids are of strange flesh!

(*The little sneer in his voice makes her start
away from him, hurt and angry.*)

MERCY. You must not speak to me like that!
You have spoiled my beautiful dream. I came here
only to show the hilltop my crimson cloak and to
make the maples glad I was one of them. Why have
you come to my hilltop field? Why did you talk to
me about running away? Oh, go! Go! And never,
never come again.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

(*The children, who have followed the scene with puzzled interest, are shocked by this disastrous climax. Peter, after his first disappointment, accepts philosophically the revelation of Mercy's Puritan restraints and her love for a Puritan. He is ready to laugh at himself for the mad impulse which made him beg her to run away with him. But to the children he seems the tragic victim of a needlessly severe scolding and a heartless banishment. They rush to Mercy.*)

CHILDREN. Oh, don't send Peter away!

PETER. Truly this town is not hospitable to traders!

SAMUEL. He let us look into his pack and he talks so drollly!

(*Mercy is recalled to herself and ashamed of her momentary loss of self-command.*)

MERCY. I did not mean to be inhospitable. You may stay, but you must not speak to me as you did just now, nor ask me to run away with you.

(*Peter, too, is master of himself once more, and treading the sure ground of his humorous gallantry. He becomes the purveyor of wares once more.*)

PETER. I will speak as you bid me and do whatever pleases you most. What shall it be? Shall I tell you the latest news of New Amsterdam, about the house of old Brom Van Ruyl built only for him-

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

self to live in—a mansion as big as your meeting house? Shall I tell you how I feasted with Indians? Or shall I show you the latest steps in dancing?

(The children are happy at once at this turn in the play, and Mercy clasps her hands in delight at the mention of dancing.)

MERCY. Oh, do you know them?

PETER. Can you doubt that I have danced with pretty maids in the taverns along the way?

MERCY. Oh, I have often wished to dance!

PETER. Come, then, give me your hand! *(He goes to her with his most courtly bow. She responds to his gayety as she did at first with natural coquetry. She takes his hand with another of her inimitable curtseys, and he leads her to the center of the clearing. The children follow eagerly.)*

CHILDREN. Oh, is it fun? Let us dance too!

PETER. I shall have the damnation of five Puritans on my soul! Well then, take hands and form a line behind me, see! *(He stands them in a double line, the girls facing the boys.)* Then the ladies curtsey—so! And one turns himself around—so! And walks—so! See! Watch and do likewise! It is like magic, yes!

(The skill of the peddler and the natural grace of Mercy give the children a model which soon carries them into the full swing of a country dance. They are bobbing about

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

*like mad, when lights begin to flicker through
the trees and voices are heard.)*

DAVID'S VOICE. She is not here, I swear to you!
I stayed myself after twilight fell!

MRS. HOYT. But the children, David! Hope!

DAVID. They are here, yes! But not Mercy! Not
Mercy!

*(From the bushes appear the Puritans one
by one, carrying lanterns and bent on the
stern duty of seeking a witch and recovering
four runaway children. At sight of the danc-
ers, they stop in horror. David is terribly
taken aback and the rest turn on him as on
a traitor. Only Mrs. Hoyt presses forward,
caring for little else save that Hope is un-
harmed.)*

MRS. HOYT. The children! Thank God!

MRS. MORE. In the Devil's Field!

SEVERAL WOMEN (*their voices shrill with hor-
ror*). What are they doing?

A WOMAN (*hoarsely*). They are dancing!

A MAN. Mayhap they are under the spell of the
Devil!

MRS. MORE. And well they may be! Look you,
David! (*She points a shaking finger toward Mercy*

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

and her voice rises in triumph.) The witch is with them! What did I say?

DAVID (*in a low voice*). Yes, it is Mercy.

MRS. HOYT. David!

(*David hears the accusation in his mother's voice but he can barely turn his thoughts to answer it. He is painfully intent on Mercy's partner, who is swinging her gallantly through the dance.*)

DAVID. I spoke the truth, Mother. I did not know she was here. What man is with her?

(*The whole attention of the Puritans follows David.*)

A MAN. There is a man! Who is it?

(*Mrs. More is first to discover.*)

MRS. MORE. Ah-ha! The peddler! That is worse than all!

(*David leaps forward to the group of dancers, calling out to Mercy in a voice harsh with distress.*)

DAVID. Mercy!

(*Mercy lifts her head quickly and motions for the dance to stop. They turn and see for the first time the Puritans with David at their head. But as they turn, the Governor, tall and stern, steps before David and pushes him back with a commanding arm.*)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

LINDSEY. Keep back! Let no man touch them while they are in these Devil's mazes! (*He strides straight toward the dancers, who still hold the figure of their dance as though frozen into attitudes.*) Cease these ungodly revels!

(*The dancers fall back, the spell broken. Peter's face is blank with surprise and dismay. Mercy turns pale and her hand flies to her throat. The children are silent.*)

PETER. Potverblikken! The old devil with the horsewhip!

MERCY. O-oh!

LINDSEY. You may well be out of countenance! Revellers! Blasphemers! Traffickers! Children of the Devil!

(*The shower of epithets brings Peter to his senses.*)

PETER. Do wise men use such words before ladies? Yes?

(*Lindsey turns on him, enraged by this impudence.*)

LINDSEY. Silence! You have been expelled from the colony!

PETER (*drolly*). I remember quite sufficiently.

LINDSEY. And yet you appear again in our vicinity—in Devils' ground, and spread your vanities among our children! See! And see!

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

(He snatches the necklace from Hope and the ribbon from Delight and tramples them under foot. The little girls cry out with distress.)

HOPE. Oh, my beautiful necklace!

DELIGHT. My pretty ribbon!

LINDSEY. Silence! Poor silly lambs in a wolf's den, amid traffickers and witches!

(The crowd echoes this cry which has been ever on their lips as they came forth on their righteous errand.)

ALL. Ah! She's a witch! a witch!

(Mercy reels back from them, her hands against her face. Their glaring eyes make the accusation terribly clear to her. David strides forward again, regardless of the Governor. He looks white and stern.)

DAVID. Silence! Governor! All of you! There is no witch here!

(There is cowed silence for a moment. Peter turns on David a comprehending and delighted face.)

PETER. I could almost think this is David? Yes?

(He looks inquiringly at Mercy. David is furious at the mocking tone and still more at the glance at Mercy.)

DAVID. David Hoyt, by your leave! And who may you be?

(Peter sweeps him a courteous bow.)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

PETER. Peter Van Brough, your worship, of New Amsterdam.

DAVID. Then return quickly thither, where you may dance in all the taverns that are low enough to receive you! Go!

(Mercy springs forward, horrified at David's words and still more at his tone.)

MERCY. David!

DAVID *(with grief and reproach in his voice).* Mercy, I did not think—

(Goodhue, the minister, comes forward and lays a cautioning hand on David's arm.)

GOODHUE. Be silent, David, do not hold converse with a witch!

(Mercy starts back, stung to terror again by these dreadful words.)

MERCY. Oh, what are you calling me?

(Goodhue does not deign to answer her. He turns to the Puritans with the air of having a momentous sermon to deliver.)

GOODHUE. We can no longer doubt that among us is one of those chosen by the Devil himself for his evil works, one who has defied the laws of God, whose black arts caused her to vanish from our midst as no godly person could vanish, who was seen emerging from the very house of God with the brazen vanity of a crimson cloak, the color of sin! Long has she been suspected of converse with devils, but

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

tonight her deeds have proved her beyond shadow of doubt—a witch!

(*The crowd surges toward Mercy again.*)

ALL. Ya! A witch!

(*Hope runs forward, her fists clenched, her earnest face an answer to them all.*)

HOPE. It's not true! Mercy is not a witch! David has told you!

(*The other children hasten to Mercy's support, now that Hope has broken the spell of terrified silence that held them.*)

CHILDREN. She is not a witch!

(*The minister lays his hand protectingly on Hope's head.*)

GOODHUE. Alas, these children are in her power! Take them. By prayer and fasting the evil spirit may be cast out, and their souls cleansed.

(*The mothers come forward and lead their children away from Mercy. Mrs. Hoyt seizes Hope hungrily.*)

MRS. HOYT. The Devil's Field! It cursed my son and now my daughter! Hope!

(*Mrs. More cannot resist venting on her neighbor the malice which her own terror has inspired.*)

MRS. MORE. It was Hope led Delight to this place, I know! I did not think such influence would come from thy home, Neighbor Hoyt. (With this

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

jibe, Mrs. More turns to capture Delight, who is clinging to Mercy's hand. Mrs. Hoyt is too crushed to reply. She stands mournfully holding Hope to her.)

MRS. HOYT. Satan has never taken his curse from us since David spared those cedars and left his power of evil in this place.

MRS. MORE. Nay, it is my opinion it was cursed from the day he drew the field for his own.

(Governor Lindsey strides among the women, asserting himself once more as a man of action.)

LINDSEY. This is no time for vain speculations, but for a mighty arm against evil. First let us cast out this man. Then it will be time to look to the witch. Seize him, some of you, and set his feet well on the way toward his city of sin. *(He wheels on Peter.)* And you—we warn you that a third time you will not be sped forth. A third return will mean death!

(Two men seize Peter and start to drag him away. He uses all his strength to retard the haste with which they are taking him and succeeds in turning back to Mercy, who stands white and terrified before the witch hunters. Even at this crisis he is deliberately gallant.)

PETER. Mistress Mercy Delafield, I am being hastened a little on the primrose path, but I ask you again to share it with me.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

(*Mercy's face softens and she takes a little step toward him. There is a quick movement from David. Mercy seems not to see him, but perhaps she is thinking of David, for she shakes her head.*)

Will you not come—where there are no witches, and crimson cloaks are plenty?

(*She looks at him steadily and speaks softly but with determination.*)

MERCY. No.

(*Peter's answer is like a despairing cry.*)

PETER. I fear for you here!

(*Her eyes widen again with terror, but her voice is still steady.*)

MERCY. You cannot help me. Goodbye!

(*Lindsey, enraged at this delay, steps forward and shouts at Peter's captors.*)

LINDSEY. Can you not drag him away? Must it be the horsewhip again? Begone!

(*The men wrench him away. He can only call over his shoulder to Mercy as he goes, but his voice seems to envelop her with the protection which he knows she needs so desperately.*)

PETER. God be with you, then!

(*Mercy's eyes are full of sudden tears, but she waves to Peter gallantly.*)

MERCY. Goodbye, and a good journey to New Amsterdam!

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

(*The men drag him away. The Puritans watch with righteous satisfaction the expulsion of a sinner, and Mercy looks after him with a face which might be turned to a departing saint. Mrs. More is quick to add Mercy's expression and her farewell cry to Peter to the sum of all her crimes and heresies.*)

MRS. MORE. She is without shame!

MERCY. Nay, I am without hope. He meant kindly. Do you not see? (*She turns to Mrs. More with desperate appeal. But Prudence, a spare young Puritan girl, pulls Mrs. More away from contamination.*)

PRUDENCE. Do not look at her! She is trying to put a spell on you!

(*Lindsey again strides forward.*)

LINSEY. This is work for men made strong by God! Lay hands on the witch.

(*Several men start forward and Mercy turns from them with a terrified cry.*)

MERCY. No! You shall not touch me! (*She runs back to the shelter of the cedar trees that guard the grave. The men halt fearfully at this dread spot. Lindsey tries again to rally his followers.*)

LINSEY. Can no one take her?

A MAN. I would rather not go among the cedars.

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

ANOTHER. If we could but draw her away from there, I'll take her.

ANOTHER. Fire the cedars!

(*The men stand aghast at this idea and David springs forward again, placing himself before Mercy and facing the men.*)

DAVID. No! Have you yourselves become devils? Keep back there, all of you that fear this field and yet dare to lay hands on a woman. (*He strides up to Mercy, going fearlessly into the ring of cedars. She waits quietly. He speaks as though to a wayward child.*) Mercy, listen! (*She turns to him as a refuge in confusion and terror.*)

MERCY. David, what has happened to them? They look like madmen!

(*Mrs. Hoyt cries out as she sees Mercy's eyes fixed earnestly on David's face.*)

MRS. HOYT. David! Come away!

GOODHUE. Wait! He may be the instrument chosen by God to take her.

(*The Puritans watch, willing no doubt to let David act for them. David thinks only of bringing Mercy back to her senses and of saving her from the consequences of what seems to him mere wilful folly.*)

DAVID. Mercy, they are like madmen, because all their laws have been broken, and you have broken them—

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

MERCY. Have I hurt any of them? Answer me!

DAVID. You hurt all of them when you break the laws that are the very breath of their life. You have trafficked with a sinful and worldly man, and dressed yourself in forbidden colors, and profaned God's house with—

MERCY. David! It is you who are hurting me now! Profane is a terrible word! How could my sitting in the tower profane it? I sat there as happy as an angel, high above the town, under the great shadow of the bell. The beautiful red cloth rippled round me and made me so glad that I sang—(*She is carried back into the memory of that joyful experience so that for a moment the witch-hunting Puritans and even the reproach in David's eyes is forgotten. David is shocked that even now she is in love with her sin.*)

DAVID. Hush, Mercy! Can you not see that it was wicked?

MERCY. Surely I could not have been so happy if it had been really wicked.

DAVID. That is what all sinners say. They are all happy in sin.

(*Mercy shakes her head and speaks more gravely.*)

MERCY. No, David, I think that if it is real sin, they are ill at ease.

(*To David her philosophy is incomprehensible.*
[186]

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

sible and baffling, at war with all his Puritan precepts.)

DAVID. You do not understand! You are like a child.

MERCY. Perhaps that is true. Only the children seem to love me. (*She turns away from him sadly. He follows her, torn between his love for her and his outraged Puritan loyalties.*)

DAVID. Mercy, I would love you if you would cast away vanity and sin!

(*Mercy looks at him still more sadly, so that he seems the child, one who had grieved a wise mother beyond his small power to understand.*)

MERCY. *Would* love me, David? Alas, how can you tell whether you would love me if I were another woman?

(*At this David's love casts out Puritan precepts. He knows only that Mercy needs the comfort and devotion which fills his heart. He opens his arms to her.*)

DAVID. It is you—not any other woman—that I love!

(*He is past caring that the Puritans stand spellbound and hear his declaration. Mercy is too exalted to know that there is anyone on earth except David who has at last spoken his love for her. She puts her hands in his outstretched ones and looks into his face.*

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

eagerly as if to be sure that David indeed loves her. Mrs. Hoyt is horrified at this further calamity that has befallen her son.)

MRS. HOYT. She has put a spell on him!

(*The rest spring to action at her shrill cry. The minister lays his hand on David's shoulder and thunders in his ear.*)

GOODHUE. David Hoyt! You are trifling with God!

(*Lindsey is beside him too.*)

LINDSEY. If you cannot capture her for us, I will do it myself. I fear neither devils nor unholy ground! (*He would push past David, but David wheels on him fiercely, holding out his arms to keep them away from Mercy. The whole crowd has surged forward behind the minister and the governor, and Mercy, looking past David into their angry faces, is brought face to face with the fate that is hanging over her.*)

DAVID. You shall not touch her. She is only a child and sinning through ignorance. If your laws are God's laws, be patient till she learns them from you as friends. She will hate them forever if you come to her with this talk of terror and witches. Let me take her home. (*He turns back to her, but Mercy in a moment of panic which the sudden realization of her danger brought her, has slipped into the trees and disappeared. The people's attention has been for the moment with David. No one saw her go.*) Mercy!—She is gone! (*He stands dazed*

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

by this seeming desertion of him when he thought he had saved her. But the rest of the men spring to action with a babel of shouting.)

A MAN. What! Where!

ANOTHER. She has run into the trees!

ANOTHER. No! She must be there!

ANOTHER. Only a witch could have escaped us so!

(They plunge into the trees, swinging their lanterns, but even now they circle round the sachem's grave.)

DAVID. Mercy! Mercy! *(He stands just where he stood to defend her, too harassed by his grief at losing her and by a new doubt of her to know what to do. The women and children, left alone at one side of the field, huddle together fearfully.)*

PRUDENCE. Was there ever such terror in the colony before?

(Mrs. More looks around her and shudders.)

MRS. MORE. Surely Satan has sown on this hill his seeds of evil!

A WOMAN. Dancing, and vanity, and even the black art of witchcraft!

MRS. MORE. A fine harvest for a cornfield! Is it not, Neighbor Hoyt? *(She turns on Mrs. Hoyt,*

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

who is standing mute with distress, one arm about Hope, her troubled eyes on David. She does not hear Mrs. More's question.) Eh, what do you say, Neighbor Hoyt?

(*Mrs. Hoyt turns to her slowly.*)

MRS. HOYT. We had best take the children home. It is late. (*Her voice is dull with weariness and pain. Mrs. More's is sharp with irritation and spite.*)

MRS. MORE. Yes, we can be of no use in the search.

PRUDENCE. It is my belief she has vanished again.

GRATEFUL. As she vanished out of her room and flew to the church steeple on a broomstick.

ANOTHER. Do you not smell brimstone in the air?

MRS. HOYT. In my opinion they will never find her.

MRS. MORE. Not while those cedars stand there as a refuge for evil spirits.

GRATEFUL. The men should have fired the trees.

PRUDENCE. It was David stopped them! It was David who let her escape!

MRS. MORE. And shamed his mother's Christian teachings by protecting a witch!

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

(*David seems to be hearing these things as though from a long distance. His face is tragic. Mrs. Hoyt looks at him with a kind of stern pity.*)

MRS. HOYT. Leave chiding, Neighbor More. This is my son and my shame. Come, David, light us back to town with the children. You are best at home. David! Come! (*She has to shriek to bring him out of his unhappy dreams. He comes slowly toward her. The children run to him.*)

HOPE. Where is Mercy?

SAMUEL. Did you see her hide?

DAVID (*in a lifeless voice.*) I do not know!

(*Mercy's face is at this moment peeping from the trees, but none of them see her. She is watching David hopefully.*)

HOPE. She is not a witch,—is she, David?

(*David is silent with a dreadful doubt.*)

CHILDREN. Is she, David?

DAVID (*with almost a groan*). I do not know!

(*Mercy's face is suddenly swept with despair. The children are miserable at missing the expected reassurance from David.*)

HOPE. What shall we do, David?

DAVID (*dully*). Let us go home. (*He takes the little girls by the hand with an absent-minded tender-*

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

ness. The little group, silent at last with weariness and doubt, go down the hill. Mercy creeps out of the cedars to watch them, stretching out her arms yearningly after them. She repeats in a low voice, over and over:)

MERCY. He said, "I do not know! I do not know!" (*When they have gone, she falls on the ground sobbing. After a little the sobbing is quieter and she seems almost to have fallen asleep. Then from the trees comes the magic sound of insect music. From the cedars steps the Sachem. He spreads his hands pityingly above Mercy and then raises them to the heavens as though in prayer. Suddenly, with a lovely flood of light, the Daughter of the Moon comes into the clearing, a radiant golden vision. Pale spirits of moon-beams and moon-shadows steal after her and stand swaying just within the line of the trees. The Sachem speaks in a voice so rich and beautiful in its monotony that he seems to be chanting a song.*)

SACHEM. Daughter of the Moon, the pale-face maiden sleeps in tears. She had the heart of a great medicine woman and has often come here to receive the spirit of the Manitou. It was she who stayed the hatchet from my girdle of cedars and left the shadows here for the feet of the Moon Maiden. Often have we given her dreams of joy, but tonight she sleeps in tears.

MOON MAIDEN. I have come! She shall sleep wrapped in my golden dreams. (*She dances about Mercy as though weaving a spell over her. The*

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

shadows and moon-beams follow in mystic figures: the Sachem stands watching calmly. At last Mercy stirs and raises herself on her arm, looking about with dreamy eyes. At sight of the Moon Maiden, she cries out with ecstasy.)

MERCY. Oh!

(The fairy spirits creep closer, and as she sees them the wonder in her face deepens.)

Who are you all?

SACHEM. Pale-face maiden, do not fear. We guard you now as you have guarded us.

(Mercy speaks softly as though conscious she is still in a dream.)

MERCY. When have I guarded you? I have never seen you.

SACHEM. You did not see. Your heart knew that a great Sachem slept here! He wished beauty and peace for his sleep, but the white man came and broke the beauty. The shadows of the trees were swept away from the ground. The song of winds in the branches died. Only the maiden with the heart of a medicine woman knew and stayed the hatchet from the very bed of the Sachem.

(Mercy smiles, for the mystery of her joy in this place is being revealed by this dream.)

MERCY. I always loved this hilltop. I didn't want David to make it into a field, for it seemed made for dreams and beauty. It was the first place where the azalea bloomed in the spring, and the leaves

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

reddened here while the other trees were still green. It did not seem meant to be like other fields—yet I did not fully understand.

(David comes in with a torch in his hand and tragic determination on his face. He keeps repeating to himself as though to goad himself on.)

DAVID. I must burn the cedars! I must burn the cedars! A refuge for evil spirits! It is I who must burn them! *(He lifts the torch and goes toward the cedars, blind to the vision which Mercy sees, not even aware of Mercy herself. But the memory of Mercy rises before him and he flings down the torch and grinds out its light. He cries in agony:) Mercy! I can't! Mercy!*

(Mercy seems to hear as though from a long distance. Her face lifts eagerly.)

MERCY. Did someone call?

(The Sachem steps closer and speaks in a voice of warning.)

SACHEM. One calls, but you cannot answer. You are in a dream.

(When Mercy spoke, David looked up and saw her. He starts eagerly forward.)

DAVID. Mercy! Ah, she is here!

(But Mercy does not hear or see. She turns away from David and speaks to the Sachem. David falls back, awed and puzzled by her strange words to persons who are invisible to him.)

MERCY. Oh, let me stay in this dream! Keep the town away from me with its dreadful talk of sin. It is not sin I love, for all David says; it is joy and beauty and color! In the town they are ugly and sad, but you—(*She holds out her arms to the Moon Maiden and her spirits.*) you are so beautiful I can hardly bear to look at you!

(*David looks gropingly about, but can see no one. His voice is intense and husky with awe.*)

DAVID. Mercy! Who is with you? Surely there is no one here! Who is it you see, Mercy?

(*Some echo of his voice seems to reach her. She lifts her face.*)

MERCY. Is David here?

(*David starts forward, but before he can reach her, the Sachem has answered Mercy, and her next words drive David back in despair.*)

SACHEM. The pale-face can come to you only when we are gone and your dream is over. Would you not dream—forever? Will you send us from you?

MERCY. No! No! Let me dream! Stay with me! It is you who understand! You love me, not David! He said he loved me, but it was only for a moment! David thinks I am sinful and a witch! They asked him—those children who loved me—asked him if I were a witch. They did not doubt me till David said, "I do not know! I do not know!"

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

(She buries her face in her hands. The spirits creep pityingly close. David is filled with remorse and bitterness.)

DAVID. Mercy, I was blind! I thought you had deceived me! Oh, I was blind! (She does not hear David, but lifts her face to the Sachem.)

MERCY. If he had understood—if he had loved me even a little, he could never have said, "I do not know!"

(The Sachem's voice is deep with pity. He holds out his hand benignly.)

SACHEM. Forget, and rest your heart in the beauty of the Moon Maiden. Live only in your dream! Forget, forget!

(Mercy springs to her feet and turns away from the calming hand.)

MERCY. Can I ever forget? Can even beauty make me glad again? Does God mean us to remember only sins and laws against sinning, and the punishment of sinners? Then why did He make the wind laugh in the trees and the clouds so swift and adventurous, and the flowers and butterflies of all gay and joyful colors in the world? Why did He let me love them so that I want to be like them—laughing like the wind, running away after the clouds, bright as butterflies and flowers? (As always when she thinks of these things, joy has taken possession of her. Her voice soars happily. She runs and almost dances.)

DAVID. Ah! You are like that, and for that I loved you! Yet I could not see! I thought you sinful! (*He bows his head in despair.*)

(*Mercy goes on speaking with a serene dreamy happiness.*)

MERCY. Here on this hilltop, God seemed to smile when I told Him my dreams. For He too must look out from His sky and see how beautiful is His world! (*She holds out her arms to the valley, and David turns and follows her gesture so that he is facing the audience.*) Look! How it lies in a mist of silver under the moon; and the stars hang over the farthest hills, like bright points on a hidden crown.

DAVID. This is the very revelation of God! (*He stands ecstatic in the realization of her religion of beauty and joy. But she has turned away with a shudder of pain, and appeals once more to the Sachem.*)

MERCY. But even here on my hill, the town followed me to drive out the beauty. First David cut the woods away! I forgave him for that, for after all he spared your cedars.

(*David makes a little protesting gesture and his face is full of shame.*)

SACHEM. Yes, for your tears saved them, and once again, this very night, you have saved the trees which guard my sleep.

(*Mercy looks up, puzzled.*)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

MERCY. Tonight? How have I saved the cedar trees tonight?

(David starts forward in terror lest these unknown spirits betray him and so drive Mercy from him forever.)

DAVID. Whoever you are who speak with her, do not tell her what I came here to do!

(The Sachem is silent, and Mercy answers her own question.)

MERCY. Ah yes, those men with madness in their eyes—they would have fired the cedars!

(Now that the peril has passed David's head sinks again.)

DAVID. I am ashamed.

MERCY. But it was David who turned them back!

DAVID. And then came himself—with their madness blinding his own eyes.

SACHEM. The peril has been closer than you know.

MERCY. Ah! terribly close! When I saw them glaring at me like madmen, I knew they would destroy me in spite of David. I could not stand there and see their faces! I was afraid! I ran and hid in the trees!

DAVID. And for that I doubted you!

MERCY. Here on my very hill where I have always come to forget the town, it pressed round me and called me "Witch." Where shall I go now to find peace for my dreams? Where will God let me live and be glad? Where do you live?

SACHEM. In the Land of the Hereafter.

(*Mercy stretches out her arms to him.*)

MERCY. Oh, take me there with you!

(*David springs forward with terror.*)

DAVID. Where are you going, Mercy? Are you leaving me? I will make you hear me! Mercy!

(*The strength of the cry reaches her. Her hand flies to her throat. She speaks sharply.*)

MERCY. Oh, I know that was David!

SACHEM. Will you stay with the pale-face? Will you not live with us forever in your dreams? (*There is regret in his voice which makes Mercy hesitate.*)

MERCY. But if David wants me—

(*David presses forward to win her from this world of dreams.*)

DAVID. I do want you, Mercy! Wake from this dream! Oh, the men will return and find you like this! They will say you are talking with evil spirits —another proof that you are a witch!

(*Acute pain flashes across Mercy's face at this word.*)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

MERCY. Witch! That dreadful word! Oh, I know that was David!

DAVID. Forgive me!

SACHEM. Will you let the pale-face break the beauty in your heart, as he would break the beauty on my hill?

MERCY (*with loyalty and a tolerance which she learned long before David*). But no—He will not break it! There is another kind of beauty with David. It is the beauty of kindness and courage. It was his courage which made him clear this field when terrors threatened him, and it was his kindness that spared the cedars, because he saw how I would grieve if they were destroyed. And tonight he stood against all the men of the town, even against the Governor, and would not let them touch me nor call me witch! Was there nothing beautiful in that? (*Silence answers her exultant challenge and in the silence another thought of David comes to her.*) But after that he doubted—for he does not understand our beauty or our dreams.

DAVID. I do understand! I understand! I see at last! (*His arms are open to her. He comes toward her. The Sachem lifts his hand.*)

SACHEM. Lo! Blindness is lifted from the eyes of the pale-face. He is coming into your dream.

MERCY. David? Is David to come at last? (*Her voice is incredulous. She looks about her searchingingly*

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

and then stretches out her arms in welcome.) Oh, David! Come!

(The music rises again and the Moon Maiden dances amid her shadows. As David approaches Mercy, the vision becomes clear to him, and he goes toward it with ever-increasing awe and wonder. Mercy sees him at last and her face welcomes him. He takes her in his arms and they stand together while the beauty whirls about them. Finally the Moon Maiden and her shadows steal back into the trees, the music sinks to a dreamy song. The Sachem steps forward and raises his hand as though in blessing.)

SACHEM. Guard her well, O pale-face. Keep safe the beauty of her dream. Let her heart tread on high hills and forbid it not. For her heart moves in places unknown to the white man and listens to voices that he hears not and sings a song which he has not learned. Break not her dream, for when her dream shall break, then shall her heart break too. And in the Land of the Hereafter, I shall hear her weeping.

(David bows his head, and the Sachem steps back into the trees. Mercy and David seem to wake from their dream. Mercy looks with surprise into David's face.)

MERCY. David! Are you really here? I thought it was only in my dream. Why did you come back again?

(David winces at this question and turns away from her.)

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

DAVID. Do not ask me that.

(She follows him, smiling like a child teasing for a caress.)

MERCY. I thought perhaps you had come back to find me.

(He takes her hands, but he is too honest a Puritan to deceive her.)

DAVID. No; for I thought you had left me and I should never find you again—I was too blind! And when at last I did find you, you were lost to me in a dream where I could not follow.

MERCY. Ah, it was a beautiful dream!

DAVID. So I learned, when at last I entered it!

MERCY. Perhaps we are still in a dream! Oh, David! Let us stay! Never let us go back to the town!

(David speaks thoughtfully and solemnly.)

DAVID. No, we cannot go back to the town.

MERCY. Where shall we go?

DAVID. We will go forth together—away from talk of sins, away from men who fear to dream of beauty. I shall make our home a place of refuge, and you shall fill it with your revelation of God. Oh, Mercy, will you come?

MERCY. Wherever I go with you, David, I shall

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

not be afraid. But I wish we might stay here on our beautiful hill!

DAVID. We will take it with us in our' hearts.

(*Mercy breaks away from David to run to the circle of cedars.*)

MERCY. Oh, great Sachem, we must leavt your beautiful hill, but we will make a magic spell of the love we found here, to keep it safe forever. You will have two, now, to guard your hill, and you may rest in peace—for David understands! David loves me! (*She turns back to David, and finds him standing with wistful face turned to the town.*) What are you looking at so sadly, David?

DAVID. I am saying goodbye to our people and our homes.

MERCY. Ah, yes, we are leaving them too!—But they do not want us: to them all our joy is sin!

(*David nods slowly.*)

DAVID. There is a light in our house. Mother will have returned.

MERCY. And see, lanterns at the foot of the hill. The men are going home too. (*She shudders.*) David, never let them find me! (*David takes her in his arms.*)

DAVID. When morning comes, we shall be far from the fear of their finding you. Ah, may blindness

THE DEVIL'S FIELD

be lifted from their eyes so that some day when we return they may know us and give us welcome.

(Mercy runs to the edge of the field and waves a farewell to the town. There is no sadness in her face as in David's, only the light of escape and, perhaps, since she is a witch, of mockery.)

MERCY. Till then, farewell! David and I are going out into the world! There beauty waits for us, and joy! My heart has always cried out that some day I should run away and find them—perhaps beyond the farthest hill that I can see—or the farthest star! *(She turns to David, her hand outstretched. She finds his face shining now, no other thought in his mind than his joy in her.)* Ah, David! Think no more of the lights in the town. There is a star beckoning to us! Come!

(He takes her hand and with the happy speed of two who are running away into an adventure, they brush back the branches and disappear into the forest. The Devil's Field is left empty in the moonlight. The cedars look calmly down on the Puritan village below.)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

CHARACTERS

PIERRE, the shepherd boy

FRANÇOIS

LUCETTE } children of the village

JEANNE

MARIE

PAUL

THE MOTHER OF MARIE

THE LADY

COUNT BERTRAND

GASPARD, Father to Marie

THE PRIEST

Ladies and gentlemen of the Count's court, peasant
women and children, Crusaders

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(*A Christmas Miracle*)

(*The miracle happens in the age and country of miracles, Mediaeval France. The place is the center of a little twelfth century town—the open square before the Cathedral of L'Enfant Jesus. The cathedral itself was named after one of the rarest Christmas Miracles and is a place of such mystery and beauty that to live in its shadow is to be forever shaded from the light of common day—forever humbly expectant of the touch of heavenly things.*

Though we cannot see the cathedral, we feel this mysterious shadow and guess its presence at the right of the square from a simple shrine sheltering the crèche where worshippers may stop to pray before they enter the famous church.

At the left stands a peasant's cottage with its garden opening upon the cathedral square. Across the back of the stage, between the cottage and the unseen cathedral there may be simple arches as of a cloister. Through the arches one sees the deep blue sky of twilight. Tall cedars shelter the little cottage on one side and the little shrine on the other.

It is twilight on Christmas eve. But in spite

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

of the season, the cathedral square is empty and dim. One little candle burns before the crèche on the shrine and the window of the cottage is alight, but there is no stir of festival or joy. The only sound is a strain of piping, very quiet and tender, like the song which Mary sang to her babe before the world had hailed Him king.

The piping ceases and a shepherd boy enters with his reed pipe still held near his lips. He is young and straight as an archangel on a church window, and his bright hair and the beauty of his face make him seem like a saint. But his rough shepherd's dress and a shy, humble air seem to deny any remarkable quality in him. He goes to the door of the little cottage and lays his hand tenderly against it. He speaks softly, with joyful and intense eagerness as though he were sure of an answer:)

PIERRE.

Marie! Here is your shepherd boy come home—

And I have made a song to pipe to you,
A song of Christmas eve for you, Marie.
Marie!

(Instead of an answer from the little house, there is a sudden burst of music—far and holy, like an anthem sung by beautiful voices. Pierre turns from the door in wonder, his face ecstatic and amazed. There is an opening “Alleluia” and then silence.)

Ah, music as of Heaven! Strangely sweet—

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

Filling the air as with a holy hymn.
I dreamed I heard such music long ago
One day when as a child I cut the reed
To make this shepherd's pipe I play upon.

(*He looks lovingly at the pipe in his hands.*

The music rises again and carols sweetly.

Pierre's face lifts again in puzzled wonder.)

Who is it sings? Whence does the music come?
From the cathedral choirs?

No, but I dream.

What song has echoed in those lonely aisles
These four long years, while God's great dwelling-place

Stands hushed and empty. Those who might have sung

Such holy anthems on this Christmas night
Have all marched forth on perilous crusades,
With war-songs sweeping anthems from their lips.

Four years pass slowly where there is no song.
Did I then dream I heard far harmonies?

Surely the great cathedral's heart is dumb;
Its windows, jeweled once with light, are blind;
Its towers dream darkly of the distant day
When there were priests to make its altars shine
With thousand candles;—and from all fair France

Pilgrims came here and crowded to its doors
'At Christmas tide to seek the miracle
Which gave the church its name, L'Enfant Jesus.
Those days are dreams; the priest who spoke to us

Of love divine and God's eternal life,
Is warring for God's grave in Palestine.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

Four years pass sadly when the church is dumb.

(He bows his head. But the music swells forth again, nearer this time and with a more exultant sound. Pierre's face lifts again. A half incredulous joy struggles with his bitterness and triumphs as the music rises to strength and jubilance.)

Nay, there is music, and I did not dream!

And yet I think no mortal sings. 'Tis like
The voices of the angels that of old
Sang to the shepherds on the quiet hills
Near Bethlehem upon the holy night.

(Suddenly a shaft of white light sweeps across the shrine and touches Pierre. His face, as he raises it in surprise, is bathed in mysterious radiance.)

Behold!

What is this sudden light?

(He falls to his knees before the shrine.)

Ah, mighty God!

This is not sun nor moon nor any light
That shines on earth. And in the air I hear
The whir of mighty wings. I have great dread.
Ah, God, what will you with your shepherd boy?

(Trembling with the holy mystery, he bows his head. The music swells into the anthem of glad tidings. Pierre lifts his face with wondering joy.)

Glad tidings unto earth! Oh, let me hear!

Shall I then be your messenger of joy

To a sad world tonight? Is this your will?

Oh, little Christ Child, who these lonely years
Hast heard my pipe when all your choirs were
dumb

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

And known my prayers although your doors
were barred?

Is this a promise of the miracle

That is denied your world these warring years?

(The light seems to move and Pierre, yearning towards it, follows it to the right, across the square.)

Oh, Light of God, stay till my heart beholds
How I may serve the Christ. I sought to serve
His tired babes and mothers while their men
Fought in the far crusade. Yet I would make
My shepherd's pipe a gift to God Himself
Since earthly service only is divine
Which has its end in God.

(He is standing before the crèche and now he lifts the pipe toward the cradled image of the Child.)

Ah, I have dreamed—

And in my dreams the great cathedral doors
Were wide again: the Christ's high altar shone
With blaze of candles: and I brought my pipe,
A Christmas offering!

(His arms go out in a gesture of yearning.)

When shall it be?

(He stands as though almost expectant of an answer. But there is no break in the far song of the mysterious voices. The shaft of light moves away and Pierre, walking in its radiance, disappears beyond the cloister arches. The music seems to move before him and finally it dies away and the square is left in hushed twilight once more. Then the cottage door opens, and François, a boy of twelve, stands there, calling back over his

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

shoulder to someone in the candle-lit room within.)

FRANÇOIS.

Marie! Come out! Did you not hear Pierre
Playing his pipe?

(*Behind him Jeanne, a grave little girl holding by the hand her baby sister, Lucette, presses eagerly forward. At the mention of Pierre, Marie has sprung forward and stands framed in the doorway with the children about her. She is a tall, lovely girl of sixteen with a pale face in which weariness is lighted by hope. She reminds one of the candle that burns alone before the little shrine. And indeed it is Marie who keeps it burning so bravely.*)

MARIE.

Ah, is he there? Come, let us bid him in!
I said Pierre would come tonight!

(*They come out into the garden with welcoming faces, but no Pierre is seen. They peer wanly for a moment into the twilight and then Lucette gives a disappointed little wail.*)

LUCETTE.

But no,

He is not here!

(*She clasps Marie with pleading hands.*)

Will he not come, Marie,
Before we must go home?

(*Marie stoops to comfort her. She speaks with glad confidence.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MARIE.

Pierre will come.

Yes, my Lucette.

JEANNE.

Surely I heard his pipe.

MARIE.

Ah, it is only that you love him so,
You are ever thinking that you hear his pipe.
Be patient! He will come.

(*A step sounds on the road to the left of the little house. Lucette's face lifts eagerly.*)

LUCETTE.

Does he come now?

I think I hear—

(*They listen breathlessly. But the slow shuffle of the footsteps cannot be Pierre's. Marie laughs.*)

MARIE.

Oh, ma petite Lucette,
You hear Pierre in every little sound!
Are Pierre's feet so shuffle-shod? But look!
It is old Paul who comes to ring the bell
In the cathedral tower.

(*Paul, a bent old man carrying a lantern, shuffles toward the cottage door. The children come forward to greet him and Marie smiles.*)

LUCETTE AND JEANNE.

Good-even, Paul.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MARIE.

And glad Noël!

(*Paul's eyes rest approvingly on each in turn, making much of the children and their greeting.*)

PAUL.

Ah! What a little flock

Of goslings strayed from home on Christmas eve!

Marie will always have the children near—

(*Then he adds to tease her:*)

Is it to you they come or to Pierre?

MARIE.

Ah, need you ask?

PAUL.

It is all one. He comes
To find Marie and they to find Pierre.

(*He is triumphant at making Marie flush crimson.*)

LUCETTE.

I heard you coming and I thought it was
Pierre at last.

PAUL.

Ah, do I step so light,
My little one? And is it not my hour
To ring the Angelus?

MARIE.

You do not forget
Even on Christmas eve!

PAUL.

Why, least of all
On Christmas when we should most truly pray!
What though the great cathedral doors are
barred
And all the priests marched forth on the crusade?
What though the pealing chimes are silent now
While all their sturdy ringers fight afar?
Must we forget the Christ?

(*He is like a prophet of old.*)

MARIE.

Oh, no. I light
This little candle ever at the shrine
Lest He should think we do not worship here.

PAUL.

And it is well—and should old Paul forget
Because he is too old for Holy Wars,
There is one bell that even he may ring?

(*He pauses and his pride seems to fall from him. A memory of other days comes to him. He shakes his head sadly.*)

One lonely bell must speak God's blessing now,
Though once a peal of chimes rang from the
tower
In brave days when this church was thronged
with folk
Gathered from all the provinces of France
Bringing their gifts to win a miracle!

(*The longing pride of the old man thrills the children to wide-eyed wonder.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

FRANÇOIS. (*softly*).

My mother says that those were splendid days
And knights came riding from the farthest lands
And mighty lords came to our little town.

PAUL.

And well they might for only in this place—
In our cathedral of L'Enfant Jesus,
Did Christ appear to shed His light on men.
This was His chosen spot of all the world!

(*Paul is erect and proud once more. The children are full of delight and awe.*)

LUCETTE.

The Christ Child came to earth?

FRANÇOIS.

Oh, was it true?

(*Marie smiles at their wonder.*)

MARIE.

The Christ Child came indeed.

(*They come closer to her with upturned faces, knowing that she can make this tale more vivid and beautiful than any other teller of it.*)

JEANNE.

Tell us, Marie,

Tell me about His coming.

(*She rests one knee on the bench near the door of the cottage and bends to the eager children.*)

MARIE.

Ah, then, hear!

Long, long ago the Christ Child lived with men
And there was promise that He should not die
But live with them forever. Then they sinned
And lost the Christ and might not see Him
more.

Only His image lies here at the shrine—

(*She rises and walks to the little crèche, the children following her, hushed and breathless.*)

The image of a little child that lived
Long, long ago. . . . And then our mighty
church

Called by the Christ Child's name—was built.
And men

Came here to seek forgiveness for that sin.
And on the Christ Child's birthday festival
The priests would lift His image from the
shrine

And bear it through the great cathedral doors
And lay it on the altar. And men came
From all fair France and brought their Christ-
mas gifts

Jewels and carven caskets, tapestries,
The work of many years—for men had heard
That Christ so loved the gifts His people gave
That if a gift was perfect in His sight,
Here in His church upon His Christmas eve,
He would return to shed His light on men!
And when the perfect gift of all the world
Was laid before His feet—a miracle!
Lo! Light like Heaven's own streamed from
His bed,—

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

No longer cradle of an image now,
But of the very Christ!—And angels stood
Clothed in white radiance with mighty wings
Singing glad tidings to the world again.

(The children are almost breathless with the spell of this mystery.)

LUCETTE.

How wonderful!

JEANNE (*wistfully*).

When will He come again?

MARIE.

He comes when someone gives a perfect gift
Into His hands at Christmas tide—a gift
Beautiful in itself and made by love
More beautiful. One should go softly in
On Christmas eve down the cathedral aisle
Even to the altar where Christ's image lies.
With tapers tall about His manger bed.
Who lays a perfect gift before the shrine
May see the Christ as wise men saw Him once
With holy angels bending to adore.

(She pauses as if even now she saw the vision. The children seem straining to catch its radiance too. But of a sudden little Lucette wails and points to the darkened cathedral.)

LUCETTE.

But who can enter there with any gift?

(The bitter truth of the closed cathedral breaks their dream.)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

FRANÇOIS.

The doors are barred: the aisles are dark and still.

JEANNE.

Even the Christ Child cannot enter there.

LUCETTE.

He cannot hold his Christmas festival!

(*They droop sadly as the desolation of this Christmas eve sweeps the vision of ancient miracles away. Even Marie is silent for a moment as though this return from her dreams had left her voiceless. Paul shakes his head with a quaint, comforting smile and starts toward the cathedral.*)

PAUL.

At least the bell shall ring! So wait, my dears,
Old Paul shall set it singing to the sky,
So wait, my dears, and say your Ave Marie!

(*He goes into the tower and the rest stand waiting by the little shrine. As the bell booms above them, Marie makes a sign for the children to pray and her eyes shine with comfort for them.*)

MARIE.

Hark, the cathedral bell begins to toll
So let us say our Ave Marie and pray
That though the great cathedral doors be
barred,
Though at the altar candles burn no more,
Still Christ will hear our prayer.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(*The children bend their heads and cross themselves. They stand in prayer before the little shrine till the bell is silent once more. Marie lifts a dreamy face.*)

MARIE.

How sweet the bell is! It must surely be
That it is dreaming of the Christ Child's birth.

CHILDREN (*in a reverent murmur*).

Long long ago.

FRANÇOIS.

Where is the Christ Child now,
When all these years He may not come to us?

MARIE.

He lives in Heaven in a little house
Le Bon Dieu made for Him. And tiny bells
With silver tongues ring when the winds go by,
And set in every window is a star.

LUCETTE.

The stars we see at night?

MARIE.

Yes,

(*She stoops to Lucette and lifts her face gently with a hand under the little girl's chin.*)

See—those stars

That hang above the great cathedral tower.
They are the candles in the Christ Child's house
And, when the bell that hangs so near the sky
Listens, it hears the bells of Heaven ring

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

And then it cries aloud to us below,
"The winds of Heaven ring the Christ Child's
bells!"

*(She wanders dreamily toward the house and
seems to forget the children, but they follow
her, eager for more of this quaint detail.)*

JEANNE.

Is that what the bell says? How did you know?
*(Marie seats herself on the doorstep and the
children gather around as if for a story.
Marie speaks almost shyly.)*

MARIE.

As I came through the pasture fields one day,
I heard Pierre play on his shepherd's pipe.
The sun fell softly on the grazing sheep,
Who moved like lazy clouds across the grass.
Pierre lay watching as he played his pipe,
And as he played, a lifting stream of song
Fled up like thin white candle smoke to heaven,
And in that strain I heard the Christ's bells ring
And saw the little house with all its stars.

LUCETTE.

I wish I might have heard.

JEANNE.

My mother told me
Pierre's was a magic pipe of magic reeds,
And not a hundred common reeds could make
One like Pierre's.

MARIE (with quiet confidence).
It is a holy pipe.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

FRANÇOIS.

Tell us a story. How could our Pierre
Find an enchanted pipe?

MARIE (*shy again as though perhaps she were betraying a confidence.*)

He told me once
That one day when he was a little child,
He rose at dawn and went forth in the dew
Because the air seemed full of angel songs—
Is it not strange and like a dream? And yet
He thought he heard a sound of mighty wings,
And searching for the vision he came near
A little lake that rippled in the wind
Of early dawn. And on that reedy shore,
Pierre stood still as though a quiet hand
Were laid upon his shoulder. So he stood,
And all the air seemed brighter than before
And all the songs of heaven were in the wind!
Then lifting through the music, came a strain
Of piping, marvelously strong and sweet.
He looked to see who piped, and lo! the sound
Seemed close beside him. Ah, you would not
guess—

A little reed that grew beside the lake
Was trilling holy music as it grew!

FRANÇOIS.

How could that be?

MARIE.

One cannot tell such things
Only I know that was the magic reed
Pierre cut when he was a little child
Upon a morn when angels sang to him.

LUCETTE.

Why did the angels sing to him, Marie,
When he was just a child?

MARIE.

The angels loved him,
I think. Who would not love Pierre?

LUCETTE.

I love him.

FRANÇOIS (*returning uneasily to the eternal subject*).

He is late coming home.

JEANNE.

'Tis evening. He should bring the sheep to fold.

(*Paul comes from the cathedral and crosses to the children. Marie rises to meet him.*)

PAUL.

And have you said your prayers?

(*The children nod dutifully.*)

Ah, that is well
When little ones do not forget to pray.

MARIE.

Who can forget when the bell speaks to us?

(*The cottage door opens and her Mother, a tall gaunt peasant woman, stands there. Her face is worn and shadowed, but before the light died from it, it must have looked like the face of Marie.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MOTHER.

Is it Paul I hear? I listened for the bell
And knew that you had come. A glad Noël!
And this small gift from us. 'Tis mean enough—
A little cake baked for our Christmas store.

PAUL.

Ah, you are kind to the old man!

MOTHER.

I would
Be kinder if I might.

PAUL.

I did not think
To see a gift in such a barren time
With every one so poor.

(Jeanne chimes in gravely.)

JEANNE.

Yes, Mother says
That all our Christmas gifts were given for
tithes
To furnish forth the Count on his crusades
Where he and Father fight the heathen hordes
In far Jerusalem.

(Lucette, aware of an unsuspected depriva-
tion, wails again.)

LUCETTE.

Will there not be
A Christmas gift? Why, there are always gifts!

JEANNE (*contrite at discovering that she has re-
vealed a disheartening secret*).

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

Nay, did not Mother tell thee?

(*Marie bends quickly over Lucette, ready to divert her from the self-pity which is already brimming over in tears.*)

MARIE.

Do not ask

Always for Christmas gifts. Do you not know
It is Christ's birthday, not your own, tonight?
He is the child that needs a Christmas gift.

LUCETTE (*her tears all for the Christ Child*).

But what have I to give the Holy Child?

ALL (*sadly*).

There is no gift for Him when we are poor.

MARIE.

He will forgive us, knowing we have none.

MOTHER.

My poor Marie, you make all sweet with tales!
Where can you find such dreams when all the town

Is sad with want and sacrifice and woe,
Since the young count came to his father's place
And keeps us poor to make his proud young bride

More gorgeous still—while he rides forth to war

With all our men in terrible crusades
To distant lands where heathen men must die
To make Christ glad.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

LUCETTE.

How can it make Christ glad?

(*The mother speaks with weary bitterness.*)

MOTHER.

I do not understand. It cannot be
When He is pitiful that He has joy
In fathers riding forth to lonely lands
Leaving their children desolate at home
While they go forth in ranks of bristling spears
To kill and die!

LUCETTE.

Do fathers like to go?

MOTHER.

No, but some magic in the young Count's eyes
And all the power of his ancient name
And some great thirst for glory made them go
At his command. He flung his banner high
And all men followed,—father, brother,—all,
Even the priest, went forth on the crusade.

PAUL.

Ah, I remember. 'Twas four years ago
In the cathedral—some of you were there—
Not you, Lucette: you were a baby then:
But you, François, recall—

(*François hangs his head.*)

FRANÇOIS.

"Twas long ago.
And it was midnight service—and I think
I fell asleep.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(*The Mother puts her arm about him with sudden tenderness.*)

MOTHER.

Not knowing you should wake
To find you fatherless. Ah, had I slept
And found it all a dream! That Christmas
night

Four years ago! The young Count knelt
And heard the Christmas service, and the hour
Came when the ancient miracle should bless
The giver of the fairest gift on earth
The Count had brought a carven chest of gold
To lay beside the manger-bed. God knows
He had wrested it in tithes from all the town
And some smiled grimly when he offered it
As his by right to lay before the shrine,
But though it was a store to ransom kings,
Christ sent no miracle to show His joy.

PAUL.

There was no miracle that Christmas night.

MOTHER.

Nay, Bertrand waited on his knees in vain
For song of angels or the holy light
That shines about the Christ Child when a gift
Is perfect in His eyes.

FRANÇOIS.

And was there not
Any more perfect gift?

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MOTHER.

And if there was
It was not given. For Count Bertrand rose
And cried aloud in the hushed holiness
Of the great church. "Christ Child, you spurn
a gift

That would have ransomed kings. What Ber-
trand gives

Shall never be surpassed but by himself;
No other treasure lies upon the shrine
Above this hoard of mine?" He lifted up
This holy night. Who would dare set his
gift

His hands that brimmed with gold and flung
them wide.

And in the tapers' light, gold flashed and fell,
A shower about him, so it seemed to rain
About his haughty head. And then he cried,
"Christ calls for deeds of arms, not hoards of
gold

Have we not swords? Then use them in His
name,

And ours, and His the glory! Let us fight
Bertrand's Crusade. We'll take the Sepulchre
By conquest from the heathen. Lo, I lead!
Who follows Bertrand for the cause of Christ?"

*(She has come to the center of the square
during her speech. Her acting of the scene
has followed so vividly that scene of four
years ago that the children are touched as
their fathers must have been with a fervor
for military glory. They press forward as
though to take up a challenge. Marie's voice
thrills with sad pride.)*

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MARIE.

And Father was the first to rise and cry
"I follow Bertrand for the cause of Christ."

MOTHER.

Aye, he was ever chivalrous and brave.

(*At thought of him, a wave of anguish sweeps away pride and bitterness together. She covers her face with her hands.*)

Who knows if he be in the world tonight?

(*Marie runs to her mother and puts an arm about her shoulders.*)

MARIE.

Have courage, Mother. Father will return.

FRANÇOIS (*still elate with glory*).

My father followed too.

PAUL.

Aye, any man
Who heard that challenge would have scorned
to stay,

Save some, like me—too old.

(*He shakes his head regretfully. The Mother takes up the story again, her eyes wide with the pain of that remembered scene.*)

MOTHER.

Yes, after that,
The men, all dazed by Bertrand's ringing cry
Rose from their knees, stumbling like blinded
beasts

In the dim light of the cathedral aisles.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

Some cried aloud, some murmured half in dread
"We follow Bertrand for the cause of Christ!"
They followed. Will they ever more return?

(*The last is a cry of pain. She covers her face again and stands tense with misery. The children huddle together, overcome with terror like all children who see a grown person weep. Old Paul turns away, his face drawn with sympathy.*)

PAUL.

Ah, it is better to be young and strong
And win your glory or your death afar
Than stay at home and see the women weep.
This war has been too long.

(*Marie speaks gently to the frightened children.*)

MARIE.

She is sad tonight.

JEANNE (*always ready with her grave sympathy*).
We are all sad for there will be no gifts.

(*Suddenly there is a thin strain of piping which lifts and warbles to a thrilling and precarious joy. Marie seems to hear it first and such radiance sweeps into her face that its wan little light of hope is shown to have been only a forecast of this joy.*)

MARIE.

Listen! Who can be sad? I hear the pipe!
The holy pipe the angels gave Pierre!

(*She runs across the stage in the direction of*

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

the music and stands under the shrine, hushed and expectant. The rest are still too, and as they listen, the same joy lifts all their faces. Even from the Mother's face the tense grief fades as though a quiet hand had smoothed it away. The music trills on into a more confident happiness. François cannot contain his joy in silence. He runs to Marie.)

FRANÇOIS.

Hark, how it twitters like a cuckoo bird.

PAUL (*shaking his head wonderingly*).

And sings like a lost stream.

(*Marie speaks as though in a dream woven of the music.*)

MARIE.

Ah, how it sings !

It sings of mysteries, of winds that stir
About the high cathedral's highest towers,
And miracles that happened long ago
When angels came on earth and spoke to men.
I think it sings of soldiers marching home
To little children they have left behind.

(*She runs to her mother with arms outstretched and full of a magical comfort.*)

Ah, cease your grieving, Mother! It is there—
The Christmas joy that will not be denied.

(*Then she turns away to her own serene joy.*)

I do not long for anything on earth

While Pierre's pipe sings peace into my heart.

(*Her happiness is a quiet ecstasy but the others as if released from a sad spell are*

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

happily astir. The Mother is wiping her eyes and stooping to kiss little Lucette. Jeanne is whispering pleasant secrets to old Paul. François is fairly jumping with anticipation.)

FRANÇOIS.

He cannot be far off. I shall go find him.
(Marie comes gaily out of her dream.)

MARIE.

Yes, find him, François. When you bring him back

I shall have supper ready. See, Maman!

There will be something for the Christmas feast.

(She kisses her mother and runs into the house.)

MOTHER.

When Pierre plays, there is a feast indeed.

JEANNE (*relieved at this happier tone*).

There! You are glad again!

MOTHER.

Yes, almost glad.

There is strange magic in the shepherd pipe.

(Lucette, meanwhile, has strayed to the front of the garden to look for Pierre. At this moment her attention is caught by someone coming from the opposite direction to the music. She runs to Jeanne eagerly.)

LUCETTE.

Look! Who is this? A lady comes this way!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(Jeanne comes forward to look, too. After a glimpse she calls excitedly to the Mother.)

JEANNE.

A lady very fair with a rich dress!
Perhaps it is the Countess!

MOTHER (*aroused to bitterness by this unloved name*).

She would come
Riding a great white horse. Never alone,
But with tall soldiers guarding her with spears.

JEANNE.

This lady wears a veil all sewn with pearls
And fastened with a shining band of gems!

(*The Lady enters. The blaze of her jewels and the shine of her trailing mediaeval robes seem to light the place. Jeanne and Lucette clasp their hands in delighted wonder and retreat before her, backing across the square toward the shrine, but keeping shining eyes fixed upon her. She seems hardly to notice them, but has a listening air of eagerness and haste. She stops at the cottage gate to question the mother, who stands proud and aloof in the doorway. In the silent moments, the pipe is heard playing in the distance beyond the cloisters.*)

THE LADY.

Where is the shepherd boy who plays his pipe
So sweetly?

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MOTHER.

He is coming even now
Home from the fields.

THE LADY.

Does he live near this place?

(*Paul cannot resist the opportunity to speak on this subject. He shuffles slyly forward.*)

PAUL.

Nay, not so near—nor yet so far away
But he is oft found piping by this door,
At evening when the sheep are in the fold.
There is a charm for him about this place.

(*His subtle hint and the wink that accompanies it are not lost on Jeanne. She nods wisely.*)

JEANNE.

Paul means Marie, I know.

LUCETTE.

Is she the charm?

PAUL (*still more mysterious*).

Now who can say?

LADY.

Of course he has his love.
He pipes as would a lover. Happy maid
Who can inspire that strain! When I lean forth
Out of my casement while the winds are still,
I hear him piping in the distant fields,
And all the lonely longing of my heart

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

Is lifted with a fluttering of wings
And sails away.

(*The Mother is won by this speech to forget her antagonism to the lady. She comes nearer.*)

MOTHER.

Ah, yes, I also know!
My heart is lightened too, yet even now
It was bowed down with thoughts of the
crusades
Which keeps the fathers from their homes to-
night.

LADY (*with a sigh*).

Yes, it is long, and they do not return.
My lord is also gone.

MOTHER (*bitter again at the suggested compari-
son of their fortunes*).

He did not leave
His fields untilled, his children all unfed.

(*The Lady looks into the Mother's face for the first time, and her eyes widen as though on a wholly new prospect from which her personal grief had shut her away.*)

LADY.

I had not thought you had that sorrow too.
I thought the greatest grief that God could give
Was waiting weary days for one well-loved
Who did not come. But all these lonely years
You have had this grief and other cares beside.
The children, fatherless, who must be fed,
'Tis strange I did not think of them before.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MOTHER.

Why should you think of them?

(*The Lady is stung to apology by the bitterness in this question.*)

LADY.

I have forgot
Everything save my longing for my lord
And the high loneliness of castle walls.
So when I heard your shepherd play his pipe,
I longed to bring him to my joyless hearth
To play to me until my lord returns
And make the days less sad.

(*Lucette sights Pierre at last as he walks hand in hand with François beyond the cloisters.*)

LUCETTE.

See! Pierre comes!

(*The Lady steps eagerly toward the cloisters to look and then retreats in surprise.*)

LADY.

He is tall and strong! Why did he not go forth
To the Crusade?

MOTHER.

Pierre said he would serve the Christ Child here
Not in the wars to take Jerusalem,
That making songs and tending sheep were best
To make God happy! How the young Count
frowned!

Men called him coward, and my Gaspard said
The lad must be half fool. But all these taunts
Could never make him march on the crusade.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

LADY.

He who dared cross the Count was brave indeed!

MOTHER.

So Pierre stayed—and so he tends the sheep
For all the town, but better still, his pipe
Makes beauty in a place too sorrowful
But for that bit of joy.

(*Pierre and François enter the Square near the shrine and come hand in hand toward the little group who await them. At the same moment, Marie comes to the doorway and smiles a welcome to him.*)

MARIE.

Pierre! At last!

(*He lifts his face to her and his eyes do not leave her face, though the onslaught of Jeanne and Lucette, who fling themselves on him, keeps him from crossing to her at once.*)

JEANNE. }
LUCETTE. } Welcome, Pierre!

FRANÇOIS (*to the little girls*).

I found him kneeling on a little hill
As though he were at holy Mass. I called,
“Pierre! Pierre!” Three times I called “Pierre!”
Before he heard.

JEANNE.

Why did you stay so long?

(*Pierre answers them by crossing to Marie.*

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

He speaks as though she had asked the question and no one else were near.)

PIERRE.

I had taken all the sheep to fold and then
I came to you, Marie, but as I came—
A miracle—beyond my power to tell—
Summoned me forth with tidings of great joy!

MARIE.

Ah, yes, I know. You seemed to speak with
God
Amid a sound of mighty angels' wings.
And were your tidings not of marching hosts
Returning from Jerusalem at last?

PIERRE (*in amazement*).

How did you know?

MARIE.

I heard you play your pipe
And from the piping all that miracle
Unfolded like a dream and made me glad.

PIERRE.

Ah, how you read the heart out of my songs!
And give them back to me in shining words.
I have but to play and you discover all.

(*A new passion moves him. He steps closer to Marie, his face flaming with eagerness.*)

Ah, hear me, while I pipe a song to you,
That you alone must hear, and hear tonight!

(*Marie leans to him in breathless joy.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MARIE.

I long to hear.

(*They stand for a moment looking at each other as though each were making discoveries in an already well-loved person. They are oblivious to the little group who stand watching in the center of the square as though they saw actors interpreting familiar but mysterious words. The Mother at last reminds them of their surroundings.*)

MOTHER.

Marie, we have a guest.

She comes to hear you play your pipe, Pierre.

(*Pierre and Marie turn away from each other and attend politely but dreamily to the Lady. They are too rapt to be surprised or impressed. The Lady steps forward eagerly and Pierre bows.*)

PIERRE.

Lady, you honor me.

LADY.

I heard you pipe,
And it has pleased me well. Will you not come
And pipe in the great hall to the Count's friends
The ladies of his bravest men, his knights
Absent in the Crusade?

PIERRE.

I may not come.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

LADY.

I promise you will win much glory there.
Your cap will ring with showers of grateful gold
Each time you play. Pierre, will you not come?

PIERRE.

My pipe is not for service such as this.
While it is mine, I do my Master's work
And tend his sheep.

LADY.

'Ah, other lads
May tend the sheep. But who can pipe for me?

PIERRE.

Lady, forgive, my piping may not be
Shut within castle walls. But stay tonight
And listen if it makes your heart more glad.

(He speaks to the lady as shyly as would a child, yet he gives this invitation almost as if he were a king conferring a favor. He raises his pipe to his lips and takes his place under the little shrine. The children jump for joy and circle round him.)

ALL.

Yes, pipe for us, Pierre!

JEANNE.

Pipe something gay!

LUCETTE.

You look so grave tonight!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

PIERRE.

Nay, never fear!
What I have heard this night is full of joy:
It shall be a merry tune I play for you.

(*He pipes a little folk song that runs into a gay dance. At the magic of it, the children begin dancing together, and in a moment, Marie and her mother have joined them, whirling hand in hand in a gay circle. The Lady watches enchanted. Then she too starts swaying and clapping in time to the music and finally she is swept into the dance. Old Paul shuffles across to the cathedral tower but even he, as he goes, catches the rhythm of the piping. Presently he is heard ringing the bell. The deep holy tones break across the gay music and Pierre takes his pipe from his lips. The dancers cease and the children stand with fingers on their lips.*)

CHILDREN.

Listen! The bell again!

LUCETTE.

I hear it say
The winds of Heaven ring the Christ Child's
bells.

PIERRE (*in surprise*).

Who told you what the bell says when it rings?

JEANNE.

Marie has told us.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

PIERRE.

Ah, it was Marie!

(*He crosses to her.*)

How did you know?

MARIE (*shyly*).

Your pipe is like a voice
That tells me all the beauty that you dream.

(*Again they stand rapt in discovery of each
other, while the bell dies away overhead.
The Lady watches wistfully.*)

LADY.

The bell is warning that I must return.
My friends will seek me in the castle hall.
They do not guess that I am stolen forth
To hear a shepherd pipe! They are all bent
On healing empty hearts with empty joys,
Dancing and feasts that cannot solace woe,
Laughter that cannot lighten loneliness.
I could not stay and hear their idle talk
And join the dancers. For a wind came by
And brought a sound of piping to my ears
And so I followed.

LUCETTE.

Has it made you glad?

LADY.

As glad as one may be whose heart has gone
To the Crusade. And so Goodnight! Good-
night!

Ah, shepherd boy, I could have made you great,
But you will stay and tend your silly sheep
And pipe to babes.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(When she speaks to him, Pierre comes forward and stands before her while she rebukes him half-petulantly, half-pityingly.)

PIERRE.

Christ found such service sweet.

(He crosses again to the shrine and looks at it searchingly. The Lady follows him curiously. As she too looks up at the cradled image of the Child, it seems to corroborate Pierre's words. She bows her head.)

LADY.

I am answered. Shepherd boy, I am ashamed
Of hot desires that pale before this truth.
God teach me to be wise.

(She falls on her knees before the shrine.
The Mother gathers the children to her with
a quieting gesture.)

MOTHER.

The Lady prays.

(The Lady rises and turns to them, her face
serene and almost childlike.)

LADY.

God hears, I think. Lo, all these lonely years
He seemed too far for any prayer to climb.
But at this shrine His spirit touched my own.
It is a holy place.

(She crosses toward the little cottage to leave
as she came. The children cling to her
eagerly.)

JEANNE.

Ah, do you leave us now?

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

LADY.

Aye, I must go—still bearing in my heart
A peace for those who seek for it in vain
And scarcely know they seek. And so Good-night!

(*She gathers the children to her and stoops to kiss each one.*)

But, oh, I love you all! Noël! Noël!

(*She goes, looking back to wave to them. The children wave and cry "Noël" after her till she is out of sight. Jeanne turns back to the Mother with a sigh.*)

JEANNE.

She is beautiful.

FRANÇOIS.

Surely she must have been
The Countess. No one else would wear a crown!

MOTHER.

The proud young Countess! She would never deign
To dance with shepherd folk.

FRANÇOIS.

And yet she wore
The swan upon her crown—'tis like the swan
The Count bears on his banner and his crest.

MOTHER.

Oh, if she were the Countess, would she dare
To come to homes that she has made so poor
And seek a welcome as a guest?

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(*Pierre has been listening from his place by the shrine. Now he comes forward.*)

PIERRE.

And yet
Did you not hear? She said she loved us all.

MARIE.

And I loved her while we were dancing here.
The music seemed to make us all one kin.
Our feet were tripping to the selfsame tune,
Her crowned head nodded to the music's beat
As merrily as François's or Lucette's,
And her hand meeting mine was like a friend's.
Nay, let her be the Countess an she will,
She lived with us our little hour of joy,
She too has worshipped at our holy shrine,
She too returns to days of loneliness.

JEANNE.

She wished us glad Noël.

MOTHER (*less bitter now but still sad*).

She has forgot
That she cried Glad Noël to empty hearths.
(*She turns rather wearily to the door of her cottage.*)

MARIE.

We can forgive her for she does not know,
So Christ looks down forgivingly on us
Who have no gifts to give.

(*The Mother smiles at her and enters the house, smiling. Pierre goes to Marie with shining eyes.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

PIERRE.

Those words are sweet.
I shall make a song out of their friendliness
And pipe it for a Christmas Cradle song.
And when you hear it, may you read my heart!
*(The children flock to him at the suggestion
of a song.)*

JEANNE.

Are you to pipe another song, Pierre?

LUCETTE.

Oh, let us stay to hear him play, Marie.

MARIE.

Nay, dear ones, it is late. You must run home.
Pierre remains to share our Christmas feast.
Is it not so?

PIERRE.

If you will bid me stay.

FRANÇOIS.

I wish that you were coming home with me.

JEANNE.

Or to my house.

PIERRE (*laughing*).

I see I need not fear
That in this town I lack a Christmas feast.
Goodnight, and Glad Noël! And may you
dream
Of angels and the Christ.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

JEANNE (*recalled to a sober thought*).

Poor Child of Heaven
His house is dark, He may not enter there.
He has no perfect Christmas gift tonight.

PIERRE (*raising his finger as a signal of a joyful secret*).

Nay, but the angels promised Him a gift
This very night. I may not tell you yet.
But wait! His bells will wake you with their
joy.

JEANNE.

How wonderful!

LUCETTE.

And shall we see Him then?

FRANÇOIS.

Who is it brings the gift?

(*Pierre stoops to still their excitement.*)

PIERRE.

I may not tell.

But Christ and you shall have your Christmas
gift

This very night.

(*They look wonderingly at each other and
at Pierre, but he still shakes his head mys-
teriously as he motions them to go.*)

ALL.

Goodnight! Noël, Pierre!
Pipe us a tune to follow us along
As we run home.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(They run off and Pierre speaks, calling after them at first but turning soon to Marie who stands by the cottage steps watching with happy wonder.)

PIERRE.

Yes, for my pipe is thrilling with a song
That calls to be set free this holy night
And find your heart, Marie. Ah, stay to hear.

(Marie seats herself on the doorstep while he plays a song of infinite tenderness and yearning and love. Marie's face lifts with pleasure and then with wonder and at last confident joy and peace make it almost holy. Pierre watches her as he plays and then, as though he could wait no longer for his answer, pulls his pipe from his lips. He takes an eager step toward her but she is silent as though rapt in a dream. He bows his head humbly. Marie turns her face toward him and her eyes caress his bent head, but she can hardly speak. She rises, her face lifted to his.)

MARIE.

Pierre, 'tis wonderful!

PIERRE (eagerly).

You understand?

MARIE.

I understand.

PIERRE.

I could not speak the words
And yet you know my heart!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MARIE.

I hear the pipe
The pipe has spoken of a wondrous thing,
It makes my heart leap up it is so sweet:
It makes my arms feel empty, 'tis so sad.
Ah, this is love—this sweetness and this pain.

PIERRE (*taking her in his arms with a glad cry*).

Ah, my Marie! You have spoken for my heart.

MARIE.

It was your pipe, Pierre.

PIERRE.

Ah, blessed pipe
That brings the shepherd boy this happiness
Since it sets free his heart, which silence-bound
For want of words hung wistful at your gates.
Ah, should I never play my pipe again
It has brought me all earth's happiness this
hour!

(*Marie holds out her hand to lead him into the house. They go in hand in hand. For a few moments the garden is silent. The darkness deepens. Then two men, stumbling with weariness, one leaning heavily on the shoulder of the other, come in. The slighter one is the Count, returning without arms, but still clutching the blood-stained banner with its red cross. His eyes gleam with a feverish light of despair. Gaspard, the father of Marie, is supporting him. Gaspard has the greater strength but he is gaunt and haggard too. Near the little house, Bertrand stag-*

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

gers and would fall did not Gaspard hold him.)

BERTRAND.

I can go no further.

GASPARD.

Nay, it needs not, lord.
Do you not see the great cathedral towers
Standing against the stars?

(Bertrand raises his eyes as Gaspard points to the cathedral but he shakes his head and turns away shivering like a fretful child.)

BERTRAND.

The stars are cold.
The church is dark. It was not so before!

GASPARD.

Dear Lord! And who might keep the church
alight
When every priest and acolyte went forth
Under your banner to the great Crusade?

BERTRAND (*wrenching himself from Gaspard's hold and turning away in agony*).

The great Crusade! Ah, God! The great
Crusade!

A rout, a failure and an agony
Of slow retreat and now at last return
Into the dark! The dark!

(Gaspard goes to him again and leads him toward the shrine.)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

GASPARD.

Nay see, my lord,
One candle burns before the Christ Child's
shrine.

(*Bertrand peers at the candle like a blind man seeking light. He stretches out his hands to it.*)

BERTRAND.

Yea, like a lonely star—but this is warm
And by its light, I know the little shrine!
Now God be thanked, this is the place at last!

(*He falls back against Gaspard. Gaspard supporting him with a strong arm, turns to face his home at last.*)

GASPARD.

And here—my home!

BERTRAND (*dully*).

Home? Is it home, indeed?
I had not thought to fight my way so far
Through all the ranks of demons that closed in
To mock me since I failed in the Crusade.

(*Gaspard has led the Count across to the seat outside the cottage door. He soothes him with voice and gesture as one would a tired child.*)

GASPARD.

Nay, think not on it. Men must sometimes fail
Even when armed by Christ.

BERTRAND (*his voice sharp as though with a long-felt doubt*).

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

Were we so armed?
Or was Christ with us? Since that Christmas
night
When we took vows at the cathedral shrine
To fight the heathen for the sacred cause
I have not felt Christ's blessing on my heart:
And in the very Holy Land itself,
My only visions were of demon hordes
That mocked my dreams.

GASPARD (*still patiently*).

It was the fever, lord:
'Twas that unmanned you in the Southern land
And left our army weak and leaderless.

BERTRAND.

Could not the Christ look on our sacrifice
And bless us for the purpose in our hearts?

GASPARD.

You must forget these things. We are at home!
Your young wife waits.

(*Bertrand is only stung to new anguish by
this thought. He buries his head in his arms.*)

BERTRAND.

To hear that I have failed!

GASPARD.

She will not ask for joy to have you home!

(*Now at last he lets his own longing triumph
over his concern for the Count and he turns
to the doorway of his cottage with out-
stretched arms.*)

'Ah! My Marie!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(*There is a moment of silence and then the Mother's voice is heard, sharp with joy and dread.*)

MOTHER.

It is Gaspard's voice! Ah, God!

MARIE'S VOICE.

Have courage, Mother.

(*Pierre is first to reach the door and fling it open triumphantly. Marie and her Mother are behind him. The Mother is groping like one blind toward the light. Marie steadies her, yet she herself trembles with eagerness.*)

PIERRE.

Lo! A Christmas gift!

MARIE.

Father!

(*The Mother runs past them both and straight into Gaspard's arms.*)

MOTHER.

Gaspard! You have come home!

(*Her head is on his breast, and Gaspard lays his cheek against her hair with infinite content and weariness.*)

GASPARD.

Yes, thou art home, beloved.

(*He turns to Marie.*)

Ah, my child,
Suddenly grown so passing tall and fair!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(*He holds Marie away from him admiringly. The Mother watches, her eyes proud, but full of tears.*)

MOTHER.

Suddenly! Gaspard, it is four long years
Since you have seen her. This is Christmas
night.

(*At this the Count, who has been sitting with his head in his hands, groans. They turn to him amazed, the women seeing him for the first time. He speaks bitterly to himself.*)

BERTRAND.

Ah, Christmas night! And in these four long
years

How have I pleased the Christ?

(*Marie and her Mother step back toward Gaspard as if for protection from a madman.*)

MOTHER.

Gaspard, who is he?

GASPARD.

'Tis our Count, Marie.

(*They stand silent for a moment, amazed at the plight of this man whom they have feared and hated so long.*)

PIERRE (*from the doorway*).

Marie, he is weary. Shall I bring the wine?
There is one cup left from the Christmas feast.
(*She nods slowly, pity coming into her eyes.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

Pierre goes into the house. Gaspard and the Mother are speaking together and do not notice.)

GASPARD.

We have not won the Holy Sepulchre.
The fever and the heathen drove us back.
Mayhap 'tis not Christ's will that we make
death
Our gift to Him.

MOTHER.

Ah, do you not recall
Pierre said just those words upon the day
That you went forth? And so he stayed behind
Even though you called him coward.

GASPARD.

I was blind.
Was that Pierre who stood here even now?

MOTHER.

Aye. He has served us well while you were
gone,
Tending the sheep for all the village folk
And caring for the children as the sheep
And piping on his magic pipe until
The saddest heart was won to peace at last!

(Pierre appears in the doorway, bringing the last cup of wine for Bertrand.)

See, he comes bringing wine. Come here, Pierre.
Give me the cup.

(Pierre gives it to her and she holds it out to Gaspard.)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

Drink, Gaspard! It is wine!
Our last cup, saved for you!

(*Marie has started forward, realizing her Mother's mistake.*)

MARIE.

But, Mother!
(*Pierre raises a hand to his lips.*)

PIERRE.

Hush!

(*He steps back as the Mother gives the cup to her husband, but he keeps his eyes earnestly on Gaspard. Gaspard turns with the wine at once to Bertrand, and triumphant pleasure shines in Pierre's face as he watches Gaspard bend over the Count.*)

GASPARD.

Taste it, my lord. It is the wine of France.

BERTRAND.

The wine of France! I drink to France!

(*Pierre has stepped to Bertrand's side and is piping a gay little drinking song, full of generous cheer. Bertrand looks up, a new light coming into his eyes.*)

That song!

What is that song?

(*He stops with his glass lifted and listens. Gaspard's face brightens too.*)

GASPARD.

It seems to lift my heart
As upon wings!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MOTHER (*eagerly*).

Does it not sing to you
The joy of coming home?

GASPARD.

Aye that—and more!

BERTRAND.

It is a song of Christmas fellowship.
I seem to see the faces of my friends
Around a shining board. Aye, Gaspard friend!
(*Bertrand rises and strides to Gaspard and takes his hand.*)
Drink with me from this cup of Christmas cheer.

GASPARD.

I drink with you and pledge your health, my lord.
I see new light already in your eyes:
It is the wine of France!
(*They drink and Pierre stops piping and watches them with quiet happiness.*)

BERTRAND.

Aye—and that song
Which seemed to pour new life into my heart.
Who piped so sweetly?
(*Marie goes to Pierre where he still stands at the end of the seat that the count has just left. She takes his hand and leads him proudly before the Count.*)

MARIE.

Lord, it was Pierre.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

BERTRAND.

Who are you, boy?

PIERRE.

Do you forget, by lord?

BERTRAND.

I should remember—that head—held so high—
And that strong soldier's frame—
(Pierre smiles.)

PIERRE.

Too strong you said
For one who did not dare to go to war.

*(Bertrand remembers. He starts back from
Pierre, looking at him with new interest and
wonder.)*

BERTRAND.

The shepherd boy who would not follow me
On the Crusade!

(He shakes his head wearily.)

Ah, mayhap you were right
We have not won the Holy Sepulchre
For all our sacrifice and agony.
We come back broken men—and with despair
Heavy upon our hearts.

*(As he turns away from them, overcome again
by his discouragement, he sees old Paul who
is coming from the tower.)*

Who passes there?

MOTHER.

'Tis Paul who rings the great cathedral bell.
Never did he forget the holy hours
And though the voices of the chimes were dumb
There was a comfort in that lonely bell.
It tolled away the burden of the years
While the great church was silent.

(*Bertrand crosses to the shrine and stands looking up at the cathedral. Old Paul passes behind him and over to the group near the cottage. He only looks curiously at this haggard man whom he does not recognize as his Count. Bertrand seems to be speaking to himself but the little group watch and listen for he is speaking their own doubts.*)

BERTRAND.

Silent—and dark—and like a house of death,
Where once on Christmas night all France
would come
To bring rich gifts and seek a miracle.
Are those days gone forever? Can it be
That God still cares to look upon His world
Or has He cast it by like some spent flower
Forgotten in its death?—or is God dead?

(*There is silence after his last bitter cry.
Then Pierre's voice rings clear and confident.*)

PIERRE.

Nay, God is living and remembers still!
Listen! His Christmas bells call from the sky!

(*The full-voiced peal of chimes suddenly breaks from the tower. The people stand amazed. Old Paul leaps forward in excitement.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

PAUL.

Who rings the chime? Who is it rings the chime?

(*The rest stand spellbound. Then Marie runs to Pierre and catches his arm.*)

MARIE.

Pierre! Do you not see! Is that a light
In the great church? A window seems to shine?

MOTHER.

Aye, one by one—the windows gleam again!

MARIE.

I had forgot they were so beautiful!

MOTHER.

It is like magic! After all these years—

MARIE.

And lo! The great door opens!

PAUL.

And behold!

Who stands there? See against the tapers'
shine!

Is it a spirit from the grave?

MOTHER.

It seems,

Ah, 'tis the holy priest!

(*The priest enters and stands beside the shrine. The light from the shining doors and windows behind him floods the scene. He raises a hand in blessing.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

PAUL.

The holy priest!
Aye! And I live for this!

PRIEST.

My children!

PAUL.

Hear!

(*They all turn toward the priest who raises his hand in blessing. They fall on their knees.*)

PRIEST.

Peace be within your hearts.

MOTHER.

How sweetly sound
The words once more!

PRIEST.

Yet as I speak, I know
Your hearts have won a peace in these blind
years
Which we have missed amid the clash of war.
I left God's temple dark. You kept a light
Before His shrine. You were His ministers.
You have deserved His peace.

PAUL.

We feel it now
Since He has let us live to see this day!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

PRIEST.

He has been merciful and led me back
To light the Christmas candles at His shrine
And bear His image to its place once more
I open wide the doors and bid you come
To the high Mass where we must lay our gifts
Before His altar.

BERTRAND (*rising*).

What have I for gift?
Only His banner to bear back to Him
Stained with some heathen blood in the vain
fight
Which should have set it high upon the towers
Of far Jerusalem!

(*There is a sound of carollers approaching. The little group rise from their knees and look in the direction from which it comes. A procession of pages and ladies in furs and velvets and of guards with tall spears approaches. The pages bear flaming torches which show the Countess walking at the head of the procession.*)

BERTRAND (*trembling*).

Who is it comes?

PIERRE.

The Countess. She is coming to the shrine,
And proud ones follow her to win the peace
She found here for her prayers an hour ago.

MOTHER. }
MARIE. } It is the Lady! It is she!

(*Bertrand goes toward her and kneels at her*

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

feet with bent head. His voice is husky and faint.)

BERTRAND.

I have come home.

(The Countess does not know him, but she stoops in pity.)

COUNTESS.

Who can this poor man be?

(As he raises his face to hers, she draws herself up with amazement and joy, and then stoops swiftly and takes his face between her hands.)

Bertrand! At last! A Christmas miracle!

(She raises Bertrand to his feet. He is incredulous at this joy, so long has he been obsessed by the fear of her scorn at his defeat.)

BERTRAND.

Ah, do you greet me so?

(She thinks of nothing but the surprise and wonder of finding him.)

COUNTESS.

Here at this shrine
Where one bright candle burned, I looked to
find

Light for my heart, and lo! I have found
more—

My dear lord! Bertrand!

(He turns with her arms about him to the cathedral. Their faces shine in the light from its jewelled windows.)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

BERTRAND.

Do you see, belcved,
The great cathedral doors are open wide.

COUNTESS.

'Tis true! And all its painted windows shine!
Bertrand!

BERTRAND.

The priest has bade us enter in
And yet I almost fear to meet my God.
Oh, take me in with you to lay my gift
Upon His altar. 'Tis the banner brought
Back from Jerusalem.

(*He steps back from her and bows his head.
His gesture even more than his words show
his defeat. The Countess goes to him quickly
with outstretched arms.*)

COUNTESS.

Ah, my dear lord,
Since you come back with it, my heart is glad!
(*She embraces him. Bertrand is almost
overcome by the unexpected sweetness of this
welcome. The courtiers are whispering to-
gether.*)

A LADY.

How wan and pale he looks!

ANOTHER.

Far otherwise
Than the proud master who rode forth to wrest
The miracle of Christ by might of arms!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

ALL.

Master, we greet you home!

(*They kneel to him. Tears of joy come into Bertrand's eyes as he looks down on them.*)

BERTRAND.

I had not dreamed

Welcome would be so sweet when one had failed.

If only so my God would welcome me!

(*Bertrand turns with blind longing to the cathedral. The priest puts out his hand as though in welcome.*)

PRIEST.

Come in to Him.

(*At a sign from him, two acolytes come to the shrine and stand with heads bowed before it.*)

Lo, now the Child of Heaven
Is borne at last into His holy place
Amid the candles of His festival!

(*The acolytes lift the cradle from the shrine and bear it into the cathedral while the people bow in prayer.*)

There where the Lord's High Altar gleams
with light,

He will receive the gifts His people bring!

(*He turns and goes into the cathedral. The Count and Countess, with their arms still about one another, follow him. The courtiers rise and taking up the carol again, go into the cathedral after their lord.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

The square seems dim after the flare of torches. The little group of peasants who have been spectators of Bertrand's return to his court are about to follow them into the cathedral. But François runs in, hand in hand with a tall, bearded soldier. Lucette and Jeanne follow, each with a hand of a weary-looking boy. After them come trooping other peasants leading the returned crusaders who have been having welcomes in all the homes that were happy enough to receive their fathers back from Jerusalem. François runs straight to Pierre.)

FRANÇOIS.

Oh, see Pierre! The gift!
The Christmas gift you promised! Father,
home!

A WOMAN.

Is it not past belief?

LUCETTE.

Behold! Pierre
How did you know that Brother Jacques would
come?

JEANNE (*taking Pierre's hand shyly*).

And shall the Christ Child also have His gift?

PIERRE.

Yes, He shall have His gift. Go in and pray
That He may look upon it and be glad.

(*He pushes her gently toward the lighted*

doors and she goes wondering. The peasants go into the cathedral, bending their heads reverently as they pass the little shrine. The organ begins to play softly. The Mass is beginning. Only Pierre and Marie are left in the square. Pierre for the first time seems almost undecided. He hesitates to enter. Marie watches wistfully to see what this new mood means.

Pierre goes to the little shrine where the candle still burns alone but pauses there and seems praying before it. At last Marie goes close to him and touches his arm. He turns to her slowly.)

MARIE.

You told this miracle of coming home
And still your voice seemed full of prophecies
What is this gift to make the Christ Child glad?
The great Count's banner?

PIERRE (*sadly*).

It is stained with blood.
Is that a gift to please a babe?

MARIE.

Ah, then
What is the gift?

PIERRE (*with a note of pain in his voice but no hesitation now*).

It is my shepherd's pipe.
(*Marie starts away from him incredulous and full of dismay.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

MARIE.

Oh, no! No! Not your pipe!

(*She goes to him with pleading hands outstretched*).

Nay, my Pierre,
Another gift—but keep your pipe for us.
How shall we live when it is gone? Our hearts
Feed at its fount of song. It tells me what
You see upon the hills when you are gone
All day. It tells me what you dream.
It told me while we stood here in the dusk—
Have you forgot so soon—you piped a song
Of joy and pain, Pierre, a song of love
You could not speak.

(*She is beside herself with the longing to
keep this treasure, whose loss means to her
the loss of everything she loves. Pierre is
grieved by her pain and struggling so hard
to regain his own strength for this sacrifice
that he can hardly speak to her.*)

PIERRE.

No, I have not forgot.

MARIE.

And if you give your magic pipe away
You cannot tell me of your love again.
Oh, keep your pipe!

PIERRE (*firmly*).

My pipe is for the King!

MARIE (*to whom this seems cruel coldness*).

You do not love me then.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(She turns away from him as if to enter the cottage. He follows, gathering all his courage to win her.)

PIERRE.

Ah, yes, Marie,
I love you for the beauty in your heart
That heard my dreams and wove them into
words
That were too fair for me to find. I love
The hope you lighted always in your eyes
For all the weary ones. And I shall love
Your sacrifice, when you go in with me
To lay my holy pipe upon the shrine
For lo! This pipe the angel's gave to me
I offer to the Christ that it may win
A miracle for sad and doubting hearts.

(Hardly daring to look into her eyes for the answer to his plea, he lifts his pipe for the last time and plays the cradle song. While he has been speaking, Marie's face has shown first incredulity, then wonder, then discouragement as she feels that she has fallen from his ideal of her. But at the song, the old joy sweeps into her face. She turns to him.)

MARIE.

How could I see only my happiness
On such a holy night? Alas, Pierre,
God has so many things to make him sad
Surely he needs your pipe far more than I!
It shall be our gift to God! Let us go in.

(She holds out her hand and he takes it ecstatically. The stage darkens as they go

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

but the organ music swells louder through the cathedral doors.

The light brightens and shows the chancel of the cathedral with the altar and the people kneeling before it. Behind the worshippers stand Pierre and Marie, who have just entered.

The bearers of the cradle are just laying it upon the altar amid the blaze of tall candles, and as they lay it there, a sigh as of relief passes through the worshiping throng—they seem after four years of desolation to draw one breath of peace and joy.

The priest stretches out his arms to them.)

PRIEST.

Behold the Christ Child cometh to His own!

PEOPLE.

Ah, glory unto God! The Christ has come!

(Then the priest with palms upturned, speaks the invitation to gift-giving—the ancient words which recall a long succession of precious miracles.)

PRIEST.

Draw nigh, all ye with Christmas offering
That may deserve the blessing from on high.

(There is silence in the kneeling ranks. Faces are raised, dimly expectant, but no one comes forward. As with one hope, all eyes turn to the Count. But he still kneels, his head bent against the staff of the banner. The Countess rises and lays a hand on his shoulder.)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

COUNTESS.

My lord, the Christ awaits your Christmas gift.

BERTRAND.

I dare not go to Him! What is my gift?
Failure!

(*His head sinks once more.*)

COUNTESS.

Nay, who will dare step forth
If Bertrand gives no gift?

BERTRAND.

Let others dare
Who may have worthier presents for the Christ.
(*The Countess turns sadly to the priest who raises his hands once more.*)

PRIEST.

What givers come?

PEASANTS.

What have thy folk to give?
(*They raise mute, empty hands. The Countess feels the reproach of those hands and turns to her court impulsively.*)

COUNTESS.

Nay, they have given all! But we have gems—
Maidens, the Christ may not despise our best.
(*At her appeal, three maidens rise and go to the altar. Each takes from her apparel some gem and holds it humbly toward the priest.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

A MAIDEN.

I bring a chain of twisted gold.

ANOTHER.

And I
Take from my cloak its clasp of emerald.

ANOTHER.

A girdle wrought by artisans of Spain
From beaten silver.

(*The priest takes the gifts one by one and
lays them on the altar but there is no miracle.*)

PRIEST.

These are fair indeed,
But Christ awaits the fairest gift on earth
To crown it with His Christmas miracle.

(*The maidens retire sadly. Then courtiers
step forward.*)

COURTIER.

Lo! Precious perfume from the Persian rose!
(*He gives a crystal vial to the priest who
lays it on the altar. When no miracle fol-
lows, another courtier comes bearing a fur-
bordered robe.*)

SECOND COURTIER.

And sables that the Christ Child may be warm.
(*This gift fares no better than the rest.*)

PRIEST.

Fine gifts—but still no wonder comes to us.

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

PEOPLE.

No wonder from the Christ!

(*Then the Countess herself steps forward, more erect and proud than ever.*)

COUNTESS.

I have a gift

Given me on a day that raised me high
Unto a proud estate. Now it is mine
To offer to the Christ—my crown of gems—
Set with the symbol of the crested swan!

(*She lifts it from her head and holds it high.
There is a stir of amazement in the throng.*)

PEOPLE.

The swan of Bertrand's line!

A WOMAN.

She gives her crown!

(*There is a glad cry from many.*)

PEOPLE.

Ah, surely, this will win the miracle!

(*In the tense silence that follows, the Countess hands her crown to the priest and kneels before the altar. The priest raises it high and then lays it before the crèche. There is silence, broken by no song of angels. The expectant faces fall. There is a long shuddering sigh.*)

PEOPLE.

Ah, still no miracle!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

PRIEST.

It is not yet
The perfect gift.
(The Countess rises, 'dazed and sorrowful.)

COUNTESS.

No wonder came!
My crown is not enough. What could I give
More than my crown? It is the badge of pride
For all our ancient house—akin to kings—
And giving it, I give not gold and gems,
But more—the sign and symbol of our blood,
And henceforth walk—not crown-ed like a
 queen
But like the humblest peasant in the land.

PRIEST.

My daughter, this is much, but it must be
That Christ requires yet a rarer gift.

*(The Countess turns away from the altar
and goes to Bertrand whose face is turned to
her with a kind of despairing sympathy for
she too has failed to win the miracle. She
puts her hand above his on the staff of the
banner and looks into his eyes.)*

COUNTESS.

Lord, it must be your gift the Christ awaits.
*(Bertrand rises at last, his eyes on hers, as
though strength came to him from her brave
failure.)*

BERTRAND.

Nay, then! I will not falter, though I fear!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(*He goes slowly forward, leaning on the staff of the banner. The crowd murmurs eagerly.*)

ALL.

Ah, Bertrand brings his gift!

(*François clasps Pierre's hand in excitement.*)

FRANÇOIS.

Ah, see! The Count has brought
His bloody banner from Jerusalem
To give the Christ!

A MAN.

The Banner! Lo!

ALL.

Bertrand! The Red Cross flag! The flag of
Christ!

BERTRAND (*before the altar*).

Yea, Lord, I come with this my gift, and yet
I am not hopeful of a miracle.

MAN.

The priest has said the wonder may be won.

ANOTHER.

Sure, there were visions in your father's time!

ANOTHER.

Will they not come again?

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

BERTRAND.

I dare not hope.

Beauty and vision seem to be denied:
Though I have tasted wondrous charity
From men this night, I wait a sign from God.
Here is my gift. God, wilt thou send the sign?

(*He gives the banner to the priest who lays it against the altar and raises his hand in blessing but there is no miracle. The Count, with a groan, buries his face in his hands.*)

PRIEST.

The vision still is veiled. Lo, it must be
That Christ requires yet a rarer gift.

(*A wave of discouragement sweeps the kneeling crowd. The Count turns from the altar in despair. The Countess touches his hand pityingly.*)

COUNTESS.

Alas, my lord!

COUNT.

I have not found the way!
God would not bless my gold—nor yet my wars!
Is there no service that can please the Lord!

MAN.

What gift can win the vision of the Christ
That came of old?

JEANNE (*to Pierre*).

Pierre, I prayed
That Christ should look upon His Christmas
gift
And find it fair, and yet He did not hear!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

(She is almost in tears. Marie bends over her.)

MARIE.

Hush, dear one! There is yet another gift.

(The priest has stretched out his arms again but his appeal seems hopeless.)

PRIEST.

Draw nigh, all ye with Christmas offering
That can deserve the wonder from on high.

PEOPLE.

What have we that the Christ Child will find fair?

(Pierre and Marie pass between the kneeling people, straight to the altar. Pierre has lifted the pipe to his lips and the thin clear strain of the cradle song trills above the sound of the organ. At the altar, Marie steps back a little and Pierre takes the pipe from his lips and holds it out toward the priest. There is a lifting of wondering faces in the crowd.)

ALL.

The magic pipe! He gives the magic pipe!

WOMAN.

The pipe that played to us when we were sad!

ANOTHER.

The magic pipe that gave the children joy!

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

COUNTESS.

Ah, shall I never hear it sing again?

(*The priest has taken the pipe and holds it for a moment before he lays it on the altar. He looks curiously at Pierre and Marie, slow to understand the motive and significance behind their humble gift. There is silence. Even the organ is still.*)

The priest slowly turns to the altar with the pipe. The people are tense with eagerness. Only Jeanne's voice shrills out as she clutches Lucette in excitement.)

JEANNE.

Ah see, he lays the pipe before the Child
Amid the tapers! Hush! How it is still!

(*She is silent. There is a waiting moment. Then a glory of light, which seems to burst from the cradle of the Christ Child and to dim even the tapers, shines upon the upturned faces of the crowd. Behind the priest, ranked about the chancel, stand shining angels.*)

JEANNE.

But lo! What comes? Ah, glory unto God!

BERTRAND.

The sign, the vision—as it was of old!

(*The priest raises his hand: the people bend their heads. Marie has fallen to her knees beside Pierre, but he stands rapt before the vision with face turned to the bed of the Christ.*)

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

PRIEST.

My children, God is with us! At His birth
Shepherds brought gifts to Him as well as kings
And through all generations He has blessed
The ministering spirit. So He loves
Not any show of pride nor power of arms,
But such a gift as love makes beautiful
And in its beauty feeds the heart of man.

(*From the throng, a tall angel steps toward the altar. The priest in awe falls on his knees. The angel holds out his hand. Pierre, trembling, takes the pipe from the altar and puts it in the outstretched hand of the angel. The angel lifts the pipe to his lips and plays the cradle song. The faces of the people lift once more with radiant joy. Marie cannot repress a glad cry.*)

MARIE.

Ah, my Pierre!

PIERRE.

Glory to God on High!

(*Now he sinks to his knees as the angel host break into song and the angel leads them with the Shepherd's Pipe.*)



University of
Connecticut
Libraries
